

**Kriya Yoga:
Synthesis of a Personal Experience**

Ennio Nimis

2023 Edition

Illustrations by Lorenzo Pentassuglia

CONTENTS

PART I: MY SEARCH OF ORIGINAL KRIYA

- 1 Decision to undertake the Pranayama practice p.3
- 2 From Ujjayi to Kriya Pranayama p.18
- 3 Breathless state p.34
- 4 I Follow two new teachers of Kriya p.50
- 5 Decision to write a book p.70

PART II: TECHNIQUES OF LAHIRI MAHASAYA'S KRIYA YOGA

- 6 Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya Yoga – first part p. 83
- 7 Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya Yoga – second part p.97
- 8 Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya Yoga: Higher Kriyas as explained
by the most part of the schools p.111
- 9 Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya Yoga: Higher Kriyas second part as taught
by Satya Charan Lahiri p.120

PART III: HOW TO AVOID FAILURE ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH

- 10 An important understanding [first part] p.136
- % Practical counsels [second part] p.155
- 11 The value of Japa p.163
- 12 How Kriya Yoga was born p.180
- 13 Incremental routine p.199

PART IV: TEACHINGS OF OTHER KRIYA TRADITIONS

- 14 Kriya Yoga in the vision of Swami Hariharananda p.205
- 15 A very simple form of Kriya Yoga p.228
- 16 How I conceive my Kriya routine p.239
- 17 The Kriya of the cells p.247
- 18 Discussions with students of PY's correspondence course p.257

Appendix p.269

Glossary p.287

Bibliography p.303

PART I: MY SEARCH OF ORIGINAL KRIYA

CHAPTER 1

DECISION TO UNDERTAKE THE PRANAYAMA PRACTICE

My interest in classical *Yoga* began at age 15 after purchasing an introductory book to it. I don't remember the title of that first book but it was followed by the writings of B.K.S. *Iyengar*, and then finally the autobiography of an Indian master, where I found the term *Kriya Yoga*. But let's go in order ...

During my elementary school years, unlike my peers, I borrowed a couple of esoteric books from my parents' friends. The first book I read from start to finish was about occultism. Knowing that it was not suitable for my age, I was still proud to be able to read and understand it. I did not listen to any advice to devote myself to other more formative readings. I wasted a lot of time on worthless books and on a large pile of specialized esoteric journals with tantalizing titles designed essentially to astound the reader, where it was impossible to distinguish between fiction and reality in advance.

I came into contact with the main themes of Western esoteric thought, with brief excursions into phenomena such as hypnosis, mediumship. I continued with these readings until I was 11 years old. In the end, I felt I had made a journey in an indistinct chaos, persuaded that many very precious secrets were hidden in other books which I had temporarily not been able to access.

FIRST INTEREST IN YOGA

I saw the term "*Yoga*" for the first time in a catalog of esoteric books received in the mail from my father. Enthusiastic, inexplicably enthralled, I observed on the cover a person sitting in the "lotus position". In vain did I try to persuade my father to get that book.

At fifteen, when I was attending high school, my interest in *Yoga* was rekindled when a friend told me he had a *Yoga* textbook where various *Pranayama* techniques were explained, adding: "These exercises create an inner transformation in you ...". I was fascinated by his words: what inner changes were he referring to? My friend certainly could not refer to the achievement of particular conditions of relaxation or even to vague concepts such as integrating the Eastern vision of existence with the Western lifestyle. He had to refer to some intense experience that left a

lasting mark on the psyche. *Pranayama* was something that I had to learn and practice as soon as possible. But the friend didn't make up his mind to lend me the book.

A few days later, a simple manual of *Hatha Yoga*, exhibited at the newsstand of the train station, caught my attention, I bought it without further delay and read it in its entirety.

This book had a long philosophical introduction that failed to stimulate my interest. It did not create any emotional participation in me, nor did it embody elements that stimulated reflection (*Jiva, Prakriti, Purusha* ...). It seemed that the author was only aiming to give authority to the book. Even some concepts that would later become fundamental to my life such as Reincarnation, *Karma, Dharma* and *Maya*, remained vague, buried in the tangle of Sanskrit terms. The explanation that was given of *Pranayama* was very trivial – in practice it was described as a "complete breathing": inhale by dilating the abdomen, then the middle part, then the upper part of the chest, then, during exhalation, relax these three parts of the body in reverse order. That was clearly just an introduction, nothing more.

I was sure that the ancient art of *Pranayama* was not only used to train the muscles of the chest, to fortify the diaphragm or create particular conditions for oxygenating the blood, but had as its main objective to act on the energy present in our psycho-physical system. It was also clear that the restless state of this energy was directly connected to conflicts and disharmonies in our mood.

I was disappointed with the paucity of information on *Pranayama*. The author concluded by saying that *Pranayama* had to be learned from an expert teacher. Instead of adding a precise indication (the title of a book, the name of a school ...), he vaguely concluded by stating that we will find the Master automatically as soon as we are ready to learn.

As for the *Asanas* (positions of the body) he explained the meaning of their specific name by adding a short note on the best mental attitude to practice each one of them. It was clear that these positions were not meant to be simply "*stretching* work"; they were a means of providing an overall stimulus to all internal organs in order to increase their vitality. The sense of satisfaction felt at the end of my sessions spoke in favor of their effectiveness.

I started practicing the main *Asanas* in a corner of the school gymnasium, during the Physical Education classes and I abandoned the idea of doing further research on *Pranayama*.

I was not inclined to sport, even if I had a good physique shaped by long walks. Also, being able to do something meaningful without the risks inherent in ordinary sports appealed to me. After the preliminary warm-up exercises, when the teacher gave me permission to work on my own, I

devoted myself to mastering *Yoga* positions or moving the abdominal muscles using the *Nauli* technique. One day the teacher, who I was mistakenly convinced had a consideration of me equal to zero, to my amazement, approached, and wanted to know the secret to being able to move the abdominal muscles in such a curious way. I tried to explain to him how simple it was, as long as you have the consistency to work daily for a few weeks.

My first Yoga exercise: canceling thoughts

In the book I bought there was an entire chapter dedicated to the "Corpse Position" (*Savasana*), to be practiced as the last one during the daily *Asana* session. This instruction was structured with great care and the author did not lose sight of his goal with unnecessary philosophical embellishments.

He explained that the purpose of the exercise was to rest the thinking faculties in order to recharge our psycho-physical system with fresh energy. I was drawn to the undoubtedly exaggerated promise that by stopping all mental functions – without falling into the state of sleep – and remaining for some time in a state of pure awareness, mental rest equivalent to several hours could be achieved in less than an hour. I'm sorry I don't have that book anymore, but I'll describe this exercise based on what I can remember:

Lie on your back, arms placed along the sides of your body and a blindfold to cover your eyes. After two or three minutes of stillness, mentally repeat – "I'm relaxed, I'm calm, I don't think about anything." Then, to enter the *blank state of mind*, visualize your thoughts, including those with abstract qualities, and push them away one at a time, as if an inner hand gently carried them from the center of the mental screen to the periphery. All thoughts, without exception, must be put aside; even the very thought of practicing a technique. You must never get nervous when new thoughts come up. Visualize them as objects and move them aside. This will prevent other thoughts from developing as well. After pushing each thought away, always bring awareness back to the point between the eyebrows (*Kutastha*) which looks like a small lake of peace and learn to rest there. The ability to continually push away any thought that knocks on the door of your attention will become almost automatic.

When, on certain occasions – such as practicing immediately after a strong emotional disturbance – you find that the mechanism does not work, transform your concentration into a small *needle* that continuously touches the area between the eyebrows – just touch, without worrying about pushing thoughts away. At some point you will find that there is no more effort and any restless emotion will subside. The seeds of new thoughts manifesting as indefinite vibrant images on the periphery of awareness will fail to disturb mental rest. By following one or the other of the two methods, the exercise works perfectly and after 40 minutes you

get up rested and recharged with new, fresh energy.

In my experience, instead of the 40 minutes promised by the book, the final state of rest did not last never more than 20 minutes and the overall exercise no more than 25-30 minutes.

My practice always ended in a particular way: the state of profound calm was invariably interrupted by the thought that the actual exercise had yet to begin; to which the body reacted with a jolt and the heart began to beat fast. After a few seconds the certainty came that the exercise had instead been completed, perfectly.

Thanks to this technique, which became a daily habit, I understood once and for all the difference between "mind" and "awareness", that is, between being aware of the activity of the mind and simply being aware of existing.

When the mental process is stilled and becomes perfect silence, then a state of perfect awareness arises without any content. Like a bright spot that duplicates itself an unlimited number of times, it remains unchanged for a few minutes. You feel that you exist and understand that your existence is indestructible – this happens without formulating any thoughts. You have the certain experience that thoughts are an ephemeral reality, and that instead of revealing the ultimate truth, they cloud it. I think the Cartesian deduction: "I think therefore I am" is unsustainable. It would be more correct to say: "Only in the ability to obtain the silence of thoughts lies the proof and the intimate certainty of existing."

SOME ATTEMPTS TO APPROACH THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

At that time, my inner life was absorbed by two interests that I perceived as dimensions that had nothing in common. In addition to the interest in esoteric subjects, which had guided my research towards the discipline of *Yoga*, there was in me a vague aspiration towards the spiritual dimension that I did not then perceive as connected with *Yoga*.

This aspiration was not well defined, having not yet clear ideas on what the term "spiritual" meant. I lived it rather as the enchantment produced by Beauty and I tried to evoke this dimension through the study of literary works and, subsequently, listening to some pieces of classical music. I could never have imagined that the practice of *Yoga* could nourish and amplify this aspiration.

Study of literary works

I tried daily to immerse myself in the Beauty in Nature, this was accompanied by the study of poetic and literary works.

When I was 9, I borrowed a book of poetry from my school library and began copying several short poems about nature, life in the fields, into

a notebook. Reading them frequently, I soon learned them by heart. By recalling them to my mind while contemplating the hilly landscape that surrounded the town where I lived, I was able to intensify my emotions. This event was sought almost every day and lived with an indefinable inner joy.

Listen to classical music

The second fact that my heart was turned intensely towards the spiritual dimension may be located at the time when my high school years were coming to an end. In those days I developed a passion for classical music and Beethoven became my idol. In spite of the tragedy of deafness that struck him in the height of the creative season, he reacted in the most dignified way and carried on the creation of the works that he felt already present in his heart.

He wrote:

"I do not have a single friend; I must live alone. But I know that God is closer to me than to other artists; I approach Him without fear; I have always known and understood him and I am not afraid for my music – no adverse fate can touch it. Whoever understands it will be freed from it from all the miseries that others carry around."

How could these words not touch me? He drew from the depths of his being an incomparable music that he offered to humanity. The triumph of this frail human being over a stupid and senseless fate had a tremendous impact on me. The daily ritual of retiring to my room to listen to his music strengthened my consecration to the Ideal.

Every day for the entire 3-month period at the end of high school, when I lived a sentimental story whose realization seemed impossible, I listened to Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. The more my uncontrollable emotions pushed me to take steps that proved destructive to my romantic relationship, the more my desperate heart found refuge in listening to this masterpiece.

The Heiligenstadt Testament, where Beethoven reveals his health conditions and affirms his choice with peaceful total determination, made him a hero and a saint in my eyes. I often repeated within myself a phrase taken from his testament as an invocation to a brighter way of living life:

O Providence, make it appear for me at least one day of pure joy. For a long time now the intimate echo of true joy has been foreign to me. When, oh when, Almighty God, will I still see it shine in the temple of nature and men? Never? No – that would be too cruel!

During the walks in the countryside, sitting on a hill contemplating a distant landscape enjoying the warm heat of the summer evenings, that music resumed playing from the regions of my memory. What my heart craved seemed to become real before me, perfect and untouched by fear and guilt. The spiritual reality, which I did not yet know, was drawing me to itself.

I use the technique to cancel thoughts during my university studies

At the university I chose Mathematics. By attending the first courses, I realized that a happy chapter in my life was over and there would be no time for distractions such as enjoying the masterpieces of classical literature. All the attention was focused on finding an effective study method in order to avoid wasting my energy. This also meant thinking in a disciplined way both during study and during free time. For this purpose I decided to use the dynamics of the technique previously described to rest the mind.

A bad habit to fight was the tendency to fantasize and jump from one fragment of memory to another in order to extract moments of pleasure. I had created the firm belief that **when thinking becomes an uncontrollable vice – for many people it is a real addiction – it is not only a waste of energy but is the root cause of many failures in life**. The whirlwind of the thought process, accompanied by alternating moods and strong emotions, sometimes creates unreasonable fears that hinder the decisive action that life requires. At times, however, it nurtures an optimistic imagination which unfortunately pushes the person toward inappropriate actions. I became convinced that disciplined thinking was the most precious quality I could develop, which would open the doors to fruitful achievement. The decision filled me with enthusiasm.

But after a few hours of breathing in clear, sparkling, celestial peace of mind, I encountered significant resistance. In the mirror of my introspection I saw how other habits were wasting my mental energy. One of these, wrapped and made dignified in an unassailable way by the idea of socialization, was that of letting myself go to exhausting discussions with friends. Suddenly I changed my attitude towards them. Certainly, mine was not a particularly difficult sacrifice – theirs was not my world.

One day while I was taking a walk in the afternoon, I saw them sitting lazily talking in the usual bar from afar. My heart sank. They were my friends and I loved them, yet seeing them together, they seemed like chickens fenced in a confined space. Mercilessly, I assumed that they were totally governed by their instincts: eat, reproduce, let go during the holidays. Whatever tragedy had happened to their mates, it did not concern them, they would continue to sip the daily pleasure of wasting time until

the misfortune fell to them. This was a bitter, distressing way of thinking.

At that moment I resumed my resolve to focus on my studies and passing the exams became my only goal. Living that period seemed to me like coming down on a cold night; I knew that in order to forge my future I had to accept that heavy sacrifice. To see the dawn of "a day of pure joy", I would have to momentarily endure a dark emptiness: I would have to savor it without a moan, resisting the temptation to turn on useless lights for momentary comfort.

MY INTERESTS, FOR YOGA AND FOR THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION, COMBINE IN THE DECISION TO UNDERTAKE THE PRANAYAMA PRACTICE

An event gave rise to the decision to undertake a serious practice of *Pranayama*: a friend introduced me to Mahler's second symphony "*Resurrection*" and invited me to a performance of this work. I read the presentation sheet of the concert. Each part of the symphony had a precise meaning that Mahler himself had made clear in a letter to the conductor Bruno Walter. It was the author's intention to touch upon the theme of death as the inevitable end of all human adventures. The music conveyed a sense of desolation, but sweet, as if death were akin to abandoning oneself to a peaceful sleep. With a song full of pain, which revealed an infinite dignity, the words of the contralto conveyed a childish innocent vision:

<i>O Röschen roth!</i>	O red rose!
<i>Der Mensch liegt in größter Noth!</i>	Man lies in direst need!
<i>Der Mensch liegt in größter Pein!</i>	Man lies in deepest pain!
<i>Je lieber möchte ich im Himmel sein.</i>	Oh, how I would rather be in heaven.

Listening, I imagined I was in the countryside while a light rain was falling. But it was spring and a ray of sunshine was breaking through the clouds. Among the vegetation was a beautiful red rose. That simple vision brought relief to the inner pain of my heart by lighting the flame of pure enthusiasm: Beauty would be with me forever, in all the places of my lonely wanderings. Then the choir sang lines from a Klopstock hymn:

<i>Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n</i>	Resurrect, yes resurrect,
<i>Wirst du, Mein Staub,</i>	Will you, my dust,
<i>Nach kurzer Ruh'!</i>	After a brief rest!
<i>Unsterblich Leben! Unsterblich Leben</i>	Immortal life! Immortal life
<i>wird der dich rief dir geben!</i>	He who called you will grant you!

Then Mahler added lines of his own that ended with:

<i>Mit Flügeln, die ich mir errungen,</i>	With wings I have gained,
<i>In heißem Liebesstreben,</i>	in love's fierce striving,
<i>Werd'ich entschweben</i>	I shall soar aloft
<i>Zum Licht, zu dem kein Aug'gedrungen!</i>	To the light that has not pierced eye!
<i>Sterben werd'ich, um zu leben!</i>	I will die, so I can live!
<i>Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n</i>	Resurrect, yes resurrect,
<i>wirst du, mein Herz, in einem Nu!</i>	Will you, my heart, in an instant!
<i>Was du geschlagen</i>	What you have coveted and fought for,
<i>zu Gott wird es dich tragen!</i>	Shall lead you to God!

In the following days I tried to further penetrate the meaning of this symphony by reading everything I could find about it and listening to it enraptured in the quiet of my room.

And here is the power of a sentence in the midst of those words that made me sense a radiant possibility. The words: "Sterben werde ich, um zu leben!" ("I will die to live!") resounded all day in my mind like a thread around which my thoughts were crystallizing.

Would I have been able, now or during any day before sterile old age, to die to myself – or to die to my little self, to my Ego?

There was no doubt that I would continue to practice the discipline of creating the silence in my thoughts that had become a habit by now, but I was not willing to just look at the wall of my silent mind waiting for something to happen. I wanted to act in a strong and decisive way to cross the misty curtain of thoughts, superficial emotions, sensations and instincts and emerge in the Pure Dimension of existence, in true life beyond the world of thoughts.

In those days I had purchased *Iyengar's* book *The Illustrated Light on Yoga*. His description of *Pranayama* contained a prudential admonition which ignited my intuition:

"Pneumatic tools can cut through the hardest rock. In *Pranayama*, the *yogi* uses his lungs as pneumatic tools. If they are not used properly, they destroy both the tool and the person using it. Faulty practice puts undue stress on the lungs and diaphragm. The respiratory system suffers and the nervous system is adversely affected. The very foundation of a healthy body and a sound mind is shaken by a faulty practice of *Pranayama*."

This sentence ignited an insatiable will to experience all its power, to the point of "dying" in it, figuratively speaking. What would have scared others encouraged me. If the practice of *Pranayama* would bring about an authentic psychological earthquake, well this was just what I was looking for. Certainly, some caution was necessary; an intensive practice had to be achieved gradually and each session had to be marked by extreme

prudence.

From this moment on, I practiced the two breathing exercises called *Nadi Sodhana* and *Ujjayi* every day with *Bandhas* (muscle contractions) and *Kumbhaka* (breath holding.) I sat on the edge of a pillow, in the half-lotus position, with my back straight. I zealously concentrated on applying the instructions correctly while maintaining a creative spirit, that is, looking for every opportunity to improve my practice.

I concentrated keenly on the alternating sensations of coolness and warmth produced by the air on the fingers and palm of the right hand that I used to open and close each nostril. The pressure, the smooth, even flow of the breath... every detail was pleasant. By becoming aware of each technical detail I was able to maintain a vigilant attention without being stressed.

FIRST EFFECTS OF PRANAYAMA PRACTICE

Day after day I could verify the potential of *Pranayama* to act on my psyche. Now I was sure my old school friend had been telling the truth – "...these exercises change you inside". It had to be like that!

First of all, practicing *Pranayama* was a very beautiful activity: like learning to play a musical instrument and this instrument was my breath. *Pranayama* appeared to me as the most perfect of all the arts, also because it did not present intrinsic limits. I did not understand how I could have waited so long to seriously engage in this activity. Now that moment had finally come.

Furthermore during the day, I felt that the perception of things had changed. My eyes sought the most intense colors, fascinated by them as if they could reveal an essence that was beyond the material reality. Sometimes in the first sunny days after winter, when the skies were crystal clear, blue as they had never been, I often practiced outdoors contemplating my surroundings. In a pit full of bushes covered with ivy, the sun poured its light on some flowers that a few weeks earlier had blossomed during the cold winter days and now, regardless of the milder days, prolonged their existence, still lingering in their spell-binding glory. I was deeply inspired. I closed my eyes and relied on an internal radiance accompanied by a sensation of pressure at the level of the heart.

Panning my sight around, a group of houses that surrounded a bell tower appear among the trees. Only that kind of "light" was able to create a superhuman peace in my being creating the certainty that the ineffable "Primeval Cause" of all things could not be found in books or even in reasoning but only in the realm of Beauty.

It was reasonable to hope that *Pranayama* could give me a permanent basis of mental clarity, helping me not to spoil the fragile miracle of the encounter with Beauty with a jumble of thoughts, but now it

seemed that *Pranayama* had the power to amplify the experience of the Sublime or even to make it arise out of nowhere! I often repeated within myself (and sometimes I couldn't stop myself from quoting it to friends) a passage from the *Bhagavad Gita*:

(The *yogi*) knows the eternal joy beyond the pale of the senses which the reason cannot grasp. Dwelling in this reality, he moves not thence. He has found the treasure above all others. There is nothing higher than this. Having achieved it, he shall not be moved by the greatest sorrow. This is the real meaning of *Yoga* – a deliverance from contact with pain and sorrow.

I repeated those lines and I was already immersed in that Joy. During a quiet afternoon I walked among the trees just before sunset, occasionally peeked at a commentary on some *Upanishads*, [Sanskrit sacred texts] that I was carrying with me. One particular phrase awakened an instant realization: "Thou art That"!

I closed the book and began ecstatically repeating those words. My rational mind grasped, but could not fully accept, the immeasurable implication of that statement. It meant that I was really that light of a delicate green that filtered through the leaves, which embodied the spring that brought new life.

At home, I did not even try to write down on paper the various "moments of grace" that arose from this realization, I would not have been able to do it. My only desire was to immerse myself more and more in this new inner source of understanding and enlightenment.

CONCRETE CONTACT WITH SPIRITUAL REALITY

I was approaching that "reality" which was beyond material reality. I aspired with all of myself to reach this dimension: what I did not know was that this reality is commonly reached after experiencing moments of fear.

The first glimmer of Spiritual Reality can manifest as a series of waves of bliss that rise through the spine and enter the brain. This experience usually lasts from a few moments to a couple of minutes. Sometimes these waves resemble the emissions of an inner volcano, a "rocket" in which your consciousness rises out of the body. Sometimes they are not waves but an intense bliss that gathers in the thoracic region – suddenly you find yourself overwhelmed by immense joy and then you return to reality with tears in your eyes trying to keep in memory this brief but unforgettable dip into Eternity .

Often this experience is called "*Kundalini Awakening*." The term *Kundalini* refers to an energy coiled like a snake in the center which is located at the

base of the spine. It is explained that *Yoga* teaches to guide the ascent of this energy through the spinal canal up to the spiritual center located in the upper part of the head: this, it is explained, corresponds to mystical enlightenment.

Sometimes this experience comes before any *Yoga* practice, sometimes it happens at the same time. It can arise from the emotional shock produced by reading a religious text such as a saint's biography, when the idea of the vastness of Spiritual Reality creates a kind of "vertigo." In fact, one feels that this idea is able to sweep away all one's certainties.

Not long ago I had bought the autobiography of an Indian master, which I will indicate with the initials PY.¹ It was a book that I had already seen years before but that I had not purchased because, looking through it, I saw that it did not contain practical instructions. My hope now was to find in it some good *Yoga* School addresses. Reading this autobiography fascinated me a lot and led me to a phase of great aspiration towards the mystical path. At certain moments, I literally burned with an inner fire.

One night, absorbed in reading this book, I felt a shiver, like an electric current running through my body. A "shiver" meant nothing, yet it scared me. My reaction was rather strange as I had always believed I was immune from any fear of things related to transcendence.

The thought crossed my mind that a much deeper event was going to happen shortly and it would be overwhelming to the point that there was no way I could stop it. It was as if my memory had an inexplicable familiarity with it and my instincts knew its inexorable power. I decided to let the experience happen unhindered and to continue reading.

The minutes passed, but I was unable to read a single line more; my restlessness turned to anxiety. Then it became fear, an intense fear of something unknown that threatened my existence. I had never experienced anything like this. In moments of danger, I happened to be paralyzed, unable to think. Instead now my thoughts were moving frantically

¹ The reader will understand why I am not mentioning the full name of PY – it is not difficult however to figure out his identity. There are many schools of *Yoga* spreading his teachings according to a 'specific legitimacy'. One of these, through its representatives, made me realize that not only won't they tolerate the smallest of the Copyright violations, but they won't even appreciate their beloved Teacher's name being mixed into discussions about *Kriya* on the Internet. The reason is that in the past some people used His name to mislead a high number of practitioners who were trying to receive His original teachings. Moreover, my desire is to inform the reader that in the following pages I will only summarily linger upon my understanding of His legacy, without any pretension of giving an objective account of it. An interested reader should not renounce the privilege of turning to the original texts!

foreshadowing the most terrible outcomes: loss of psychologist balance, encounter with an evil entity, perhaps even death.

I felt the urge to do something, even if I didn't know what. I assumed the meditation position and waited. The anguish grew. A part of me, perhaps the totality of that entity that I call "myself", seemed close to disappearing altogether. The worst, threatening thoughts hung over me for no clear reason.

I knew well what had happened to *Gopi Krishna*, the author of *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness*. He described the experience of spiritual awakening he had had following an intense practice of concentration on the seventh *Chakra*. Later – since his body was probably unprepared – he encountered serious physical and, consequently, psychic problems. According to his description, a very strong energy began to flow in his spine from the coccyx region towards the brain.

The flow was so strong that it forced him to bed and prevented him from completing normal physical functions. He had the impression that he was literally burning with an internal fire, which he could not quench in any way. Weeks later, he intuitively discovered how to control the phenomenon: the upward movement of energy through the spine became a persistent experience of inner realization.

I was afraid I had reached the threshold of the same experience but, as I did not live in India, perhaps the people around me might not understand. The consequences would have been terrible! No one could have assured me, as happened to *Gopi Krishna*, that my experience would be directed towards a beneficial outcome.

In those terrible moments, the spiritual world seemed to me a horrible nightmare, capable of destroying, annihilating the person who had imprudently approached it. Ordinary life, on the contrary, seemed to me the dearest, healthiest reality. I was afraid of not being able to return to that condition anymore. I was convinced that through my intense practice of two simple breathing exercises I had opened a door that I shouldn't have opened, so I tried to stop the experience.

I got up and went out into the fresh air. It was night and there was no one to communicate my terror to! In the center of the courtyard I found myself oppressed, suffocated, crushed by a feeling of despair, envying those people who had never practiced *Yoga*.

All of a sudden I felt a sense of guilt and shame for the harsh words I had addressed to a friend who had once taken part in my research. Like so many others, he had then abandoned all practice and had instead made the decision to "enjoy life." With my youthful boldness, I had addressed him with words that were not at all affectionate, and these now thundered in my head. I felt pain for having manifested unjustified cruelty towards him

without knowing what really was in his mind and soul. I wanted to tell him how sorry I was that I brutally violated his right to live as he saw fit. Perhaps he had tried to protect his mental health rather than alienating himself from reality and losing his mind due to practices that he felt insecure about.

Back home, considering my great passion for classical music, I hoped that listening to good music would have the positive effect of protecting me from anguish and helping me to regain my usual state of mind. It was Beethoven's music – his *Concerto for violin and orchestra* – that I listened to with a pair of headphones in my room that soothed my soul and, half an hour later, made me fall asleep.

The next morning I woke up with the same fear. Strange as it may seem, the idea that every day of my present life arouses in me a joyful emotion in my heart, at that moment communicated to me a sense of horror! I am referring to the belief that man can practice a precise discipline to tune into the Divine Intelligence underlying everything that exists.

Sunlight entered the room through the cracks in the shutters. I had a whole day ahead of me. I left the house to try to distract myself among other people. I met some friends but said nothing about what I was experiencing. I spent the afternoon joking about various things and behaved just like people I had always considered lazy and intellectually dull. In this way I was able to hide my anguish. The first day passed like this; my mind was worn out. After two days, the fear had subsided and I finally felt safe. Something had changed however.

A week later, detached and calm, I began to reflect on the significance of what had happened. I understood the nature of my reaction to that episode: I had, as a coward, turned my back on the very experience I had pursued for so long! The dignity present in the depths of my soul told me that I had to continue my search right from the point where I had abandoned it. I was ready to accept everything that would happen, to let everything take its course, even if it involved the loss of my psycho-physical balance. I resumed the practice of *Pranayama*, intensely as before. A few days passed and I did not perceive any form of fear. Then I experienced something very beautiful.

It was night. I was lying on my back and relaxing in the position of the "corpse", when I perceived a pleasant sensation, as if an electric wind was blowing on the outside of the body, spreading rapidly, in a wave motion, from the feet to the head. The body was so tired that I could not move – even though my mind had given the order to assume the meditative position. I was intimately serene. I was not afraid. Then the electric wind was replaced by another sensation, comparable to an enormous force that

entered the spine and rapidly rose to the brain. The experience was characterized by an indescribable and hitherto unknown sense of bliss. All this was accompanied by the perception of intense brightness. I can condense everything I can remember with an expression, "a clear and euphoric certainty of existing as an unlimited ocean of awareness and bliss". The strange thing is that when the experience happened, I found it familiar.

In the work *God exists, I have met him*, the author, A. Frossard, tries to give the reader an idea of his spiritual experience. To this end, he creates the concept of "reverse avalanche". The avalanche is something that collapses, that goes down, first slowly, then faster and more violently at the same time. Frossard suggests imagining a "reverse avalanche" that begins by gathering strength at the foot of the mountain and rises upward pushed by an increasing power and then, suddenly, leaps skyward. I don't know how long this experience lasted, but its climax was only a few seconds, after which I turned sideways and fell into a calm, uninterrupted sleep.

The next day, when I woke up, I didn't think about it. I remembered it only a few hours later, during a walk. Leaning against a tree, I remained motionless for a few minutes, fascinated by the reverberation of that memory. I was filled with intimate joy. An euphoric condition that stretched beyond the confines of my awareness – like a kind of memory lurking in the recesses of consciousness – began to reveal itself as if a new region of my brain had been stirred into a fully awakened state. I found myself contemplating a reality that seemed a dream, yet objectively indisputable; it had arisen in me with the naturalness of a primordial instinct, yet it had nothing to do with the life that surrounded me and in which I lived.

The sense of the experience I was going through was clear enough to me. I had no doubts that the Reality towards which I was directing my life was the "Self." This is a concept I had learned from studying the works of C.G. Jung. I was no longer afraid perhaps because I had trained my conscience to live by contemplating Beauty. Another thought appeared: I should have chosen a profession that did not occupy all my life energy. I set out to choose a simple existence, without ever betraying my inner Self.

SO WHAT IS SPIRITUAL REALITY?

During my adolescence I had sometimes reflected on the meaning of religious doctrines that I had learned in childhood but, like others, I had always encountered an insuperable obstacle: that of the reality of pain that pervaded life (including not only the animal kingdom but also the vegetable one). This awareness had generated a rebellion against the concept of God as "Infinite goodness." I was never afraid to create an

absolute protest in my thoughts and heart. My reasoning was clear. Noting how many illusions were propagated by religions and sects, I felt sorry for those who, in the abyss of tragedy, were unable to voice their rebellion, indeed continued to pray to the Divine not with a spirit of devotion and sincere surrender but only out of fear of even worse evils.

Reflecting on the teaching imparted by a religion therefore resulted in visualizing the Divine as the master of the universe, a supernatural, omnipotent being who thought like us human beings, who judged like us, who did nothing to relieve us from the experience of pain. This was what religion hinted at but which I absolutely could not accept. I kept looking in my own way for the pure dimension of the Spirit. I could never have imagined that the practice of *Yoga* could lead my consciousness to concretely experience that reality.

Now, after what I had experienced, I could clearly understand that spiritual reality was a dimension of existence reachable only with direct experience but inaccessible to investigations made with thought, to the various theological theories erected as grandiose cathedrals in the realm of the mind. It could only be achieved with an extraordinary event of direct perception. The means to achieve this experience could be many, for sure they could not consist in purely mental work. In my life this contact took place after a few months of intense practice of *Pranayama*. I had not followed any teacher but only applied with determination a few instructions found in a *Yoga* manual.

I had practiced *Pranayama* morning and evening in a way I would say "absolute", with a ferocious concentration, as if there was no tomorrow. Putting myself into that discipline had been the best decision of my life.

CHAPTER 2

FROM UJJAYI TO KRIYA PRANAYAMA

[I]

The enthusiasm for the art of *Pranayama* grew continuously. Undertaking this practice was like planting the seed of a mighty tree in the feverish season of my youth and contemplating its healthy growth in the other seasons of my life.

The *Kundalini* experience repeated itself several more times, but it never became a constant. It occurred when I devoted myself to studying late and then lay down exhausted on the bed. When it appeared, my heart overflowed with gratitude towards a higher Reality, located in a dimension beyond my comprehension.

As a beginner, I couldn't help but try to convince people of the beneficial effects of *Pranayama*. I was convinced that it could help anyone to live in a better way. I claimed that *Pranayama* would channel their energies towards a more balanced temperament. Friends responded kindly but without sharing my enthusiasm. Some reacted by saying that closing oneself in a room practicing *Yoga* exercises, abstaining from many aspects of social life, was, according to them, a road to alienation.

I made a huge mistake by insisting on pointing out aspects of their behavior that I thought needed improvement. In short, I claimed that their sociability was a farce. This generated a violent reaction. They replied that my words lacked a genuine sense of respect and love and that I was unable to show human willingness towards others. The essence of what I had found in *Pranayama*, which I continued to praise incessantly, appeared to them as the apotheosis of selfishness and even of a real mental cruelty.

With a sense of guilt I saw that I had only caused bitterness. Only a "Hippy" friend understood perfectly what I was saying and showed me some empathy; however, he censured my excessive enthusiasm for the automatic effects of *Pranayama*. He had no doubt that my success in this practice depended entirely on me. In his opinion, *Pranayama* was not an art that carried its own reward in itself, but was an "amplifier" of what I had inside, something that favored and enhanced what was already in my possession. *Pranayama*, according to him, had no power to create anything new.

For me, *Pranayama* was the action of "rising" towards an elevated state of consciousness. In that state you reached something radically new. I

was disoriented to hear that it was just an "amplifier." I was unable to see that the two visions could coexist – I was young and I divided everything into black or white.

KRIYA YOGA

In the many pages of PY's *Autobiography of a Yogi* I did not find a single practical instruction. The author mentioned a particular form of *Pranayama* (*Kriya Yoga*) which had been taught by a famous *yogi*, *Lahiri Mahasaya*. When I read that this technique had to be mastered in four levels, I thought there had to be something unique in this discipline. I loved the *Ujjayi Pranayama* technique and the idea of deepening a *Pranayama* technique through different steps seemed to me something very interesting. If the very common techniques that I had already practiced had given me such beautiful results, it was clear that the *Kriya Yoga* system made up of four levels would have produced even greater results!

The technique was secret, it had to be learned through a direct initiation by a Master. Where could I have learned it? I was not in a position to leave for India. Was it possible to learn the technique from books?

I had good reasons to think that *Kriya Pranayama* consisted of a slow and deep way of breathing with awareness focused on the spine. During the *Kriya* procedure, the inner energy should have been "rotated" around the *Chakras*. As PY wrote that the *Kriya* technique was mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* I easily found this quote and tried to understand it in a practical sense:

"Offering inhaling breath into the outgoing breath, and offering the outgoing breath into the inhaling breath, the *yogi* neutralizes both these breaths; he thus releases the life force from the heart and brings it under his control." [*Bhagavad Gita* IV 29]

The *Bhagavad Gita* explains that by repeating this action, the *yogi* achieves a perceptible slowing of the breath and enters the state of meditation: with a pure heart he remains immersed in a state of peace for longer and longer.

Steadfast a lamp burns sheltered from the wind;
Such is the likeness of the *Yogi's* mind
Shut from sense-storms and burning bright to Heaven... [*B. G.* VI 19]

I must admit that when I read the verse [IV 29], I was unable to understand its meaning. How can a person offer "the inhaling breath in the exhaling breath" and offer "the exhaling breath in the inhaling breath"?

PY emphasized the evolutionary value of *Pranayama*. He explained that if we compare the spine to a ferromagnetic substance, made up of

elementary magnets that turn in the same direction when a magnetic field is superimposed on them, then the action of *Pranayama* is analogous to this process of magnetization. By creating a uniform orientation of all the "subtle" parts of the physical and astral essence of our spine, *Kriya Pranayama* burns the so-called "bad seeds" of our *Karma*.² This is a key idea in PY's teachings.

RESEARCH IN THE BOOKS OF ESOTERISM

I learned from his Autobiography that PY had created an organization that published a whole set of lessons on *Kriya Yoga*, to be received by mail. With great joy, I immediately applied for this course.

When, after four months of my application, I received the first lesson of this course, I learned that I would have to wait for at least one year before being able to apply for the lessons on *Kriya Yoga*. I felt a sense of despair.

Written material traveled by ship and the delays were enormous. I couldn't wait that long.³ I decided to discover the technique of *Kriya Pranayama* looking for something similar in the best *Yoga* treatises or to trace it in the esoteric traditions.

I should have tracked down a *Pranayama* technique in which one visualizes the energy that "rotates" in some way around the *Chakras*. If this is – as PY put it – a universal process, I had a good chance of finding its description.

Something tucked away in a corner of my memory woke up. I remembered, without distinction, having seen, in an occult book, drawings showing different energy circuits in the human body. The idea was born to consult those esoteric texts that contained similar illustrations.

I started going to a used book store; it was very well stocked, probably because it had once been the reference library of the Theosophical Society. I neglected the texts that dealt only with philosophical themes,

² We allude to *Karma* whenever we stick to the common belief that a person inherits a baggage of latent tendencies from his previous lives and that, sooner or later, these tendencies will come out in actual life. Of course *Kriya* is a practice which one can experimentally use without necessarily having to accept any creeds. However, since the concept of *Karma* lies at the basis of Indian thought, it is worthwhile to understand and speak freely of it. According to this belief, *Pranayama* burns out the effects of the "bad seeds" just before they manifest in our lives. It is further explained that those people who are instinctively attracted by methods of spiritual development such as *Kriya*, have already practiced something similar in a "precedent incarnation". This is because such an action is never in vain and in actual life they get back to it exactly where, in a remote past, they had quit it.

³ I can still consider myself as fortunate. I lived in North East Italy not far from the border with the former Yugoslavia. Those people and all those who lived beyond the Iron Curtain could not receive such material.

while, ecstatic and regardless of the time, I leafed through those that clearly illustrated the practical exercises. Before buying a book I made sure that it mentioned the possibility of guiding energy along certain subtle channels of the astral body, creating the conditions for the awakening of *Kundalini* energy. Reading the index of a three-volume text, which presented the magical thinking of the Rosicrucian brotherhood, I was drawn to the title of one chapter, "*Breathing Exercise for Awakening Kundalini*." It was a variant of *Nadi Sodhana*.

For sure, this could not be PY's *Kriya*, because, according to some clues, it did not involve breathing alternately through the nostrils.

I went on haunting the bookshop. The owner was very kind and I felt almost obliged, also in consideration of the affordable price of the books, second hand but in perfect condition, to buy at least one at each visit. Often too much space was devoted to theories far from simple concepts concerning human life, but tried to imagine what no one has seen, what cannot be experienced – such as the astral worlds, the various subtle shells of energy that envelop our physical body.

One day, after a laborious selection, I approached the owner holding a book in my hand. As he watched it deciding the price, he remembered something that might have sparked my interest. He took me to a hidden corner of his shop and invited me to rummage through a messy pile of papers contained in a cardboard box. Among a substantial amount of miscellaneous material (complete series of the Theosophical magazine, scattered notes of an old hypnosis course, etc.) I found a book, written in German by a certain K. Spiesberger, which illustrated various esoteric techniques including the *Kundalini-breathing*.

I was not quite familiar with the German language at the time, but I was able to immediately understand the extraordinary importance of that technique; at home, with the help of a dictionary, I would undoubtedly be able to decipher it.⁴ The description of this technique still amazes me. During a deep breath, air was imagined flowing inside the spinal column. Breathing in the air rose; exhaling, it went down. There was also the description of two particular sounds that the air originated in the throat.

I bought another book where there was an exhaustive description of the *Magical Breath* – which consisted of visualizing the energy moving around the spine. Through the inhalation, the energy went up behind the spinal column, up to the center of the head; exhaling, it went down the

⁴ I cannot help smiling when some half-hearted people insist that they are fond of *Kriya*, yet they will not study some crucial texts in English because they are afraid to misinterpret them. I am convinced that their interests are superficial and rather emotive. Such was my enthusiasm that I would have studied Sanskrit or Chinese or any other language, if that had given me the chance to understand an essential text on *Pranayama*!

front of the body.

Returning home, I could not refrain from leafing through those pages, very curious about some drawings that illustrated other techniques based on the movement of inner energy. I read that the *Magic Breath* was one of the most precious secrets of all time: if practiced constantly, with force of visualization, it would collaborate to build a kind of internal substance that would then lead to the vision of the spiritual eye. I became convinced that this technique had to be PY's *Kriya* and incorporated it into my daily routine.

[III]

A letter from the organization that was sending me the correspondence course informed me of the existence of people who practiced *Kriya Yoga* and who lived near my city. They had formed a meditation group. I was enthusiastic; I was thrilled with the joyful anticipation of meeting them. That night I could hardly fall asleep.

"Too bright were our heavens, too far away, too frail their ethereal stuff" wrote *Sri Aurobindo*. I never thought such words would apply to the consequences of my encounter with such a group! With bitter irony, I dare to say that that phase of my existence was too happy to last that long. It was time to touch the problems, limitations and deformations caused by the human mind when it loses its innocence and the habit of rational thinking. Many times in the future I would have experienced how life is made up of brief moments of inspiration and serenity, alternating with vicissitudes where everything seems lost and the distortions created by the human mind reign supreme. Approaching the young man in charge of this group, with total and disarming sincerity, I could never have imagined what a hard blow I was about to receive.

Visibly surprised, he welcomed me, genuinely excited to meet someone with whom to share his passion. From the very first moment of our meeting, having not yet crossed the threshold of his house, I told him how enthusiastic I was about the practice of *Kriya*. In return he asked me when I had been initiated into *Kriya*, assuming that I had received it from the same organization of which he was a member.

When he realized how I had managed to choose a breathing technique in a book and I had deluded myself it was *Kriya Pranayama*, he was petrified, showing a bitter smile of despair. He thought that I considered *Kriya Yoga* as a game for children and had no idea what seriousness was. Visibly confused, I babbled something about the currents, about the sound of breathing: he didn't want to hear anything anymore and took me to his study.

He told me emphatically that *Kriya* could not be learned through books. He began the story – which I would later have the opportunity to hear so many times ad nauseam – of the Tibetan *yogi Milarepa* who, having acquired spiritual techniques without the blessings of his *Guru*, did not obtain encouraging results even if these had been practiced with great intensity, he finally received the same instructions from his *Guru's* mouth and the results this time came.

We know that the human mind is conditioned more by history than by logical inference! An anecdote like this, even if completely imaginary, just to build the plot of a novel, has a kind of "internal brightness" that conditions a person's common sense. By arousing a strong emotion, it can make acceptable conclusions that would appear absurd to the reasoning faculty. In fact, this story had silenced me and I didn't know what to answer.

There was only one way, he said, to learn *Kriya*: to be initiated by a "Minister" authorized by the PY organization! He told me that no other person was authorized to teach that technique. He, and all the other people in the group, had received the technique, signing a precise and solemn promise of secrecy.

"*Secrecy!*" How odd this word sounded to my ears! What a mysterious fascination it exercised over my being! Up until that moment I had always believed that it was of little or no value how a certain teaching was learned, about what kind of books it was studied. I thought the only important thing was that it should be practiced correctly. I began to think that it was natural to protect a precious teaching from prying eyes. So then I had nothing to complain about the request for secrecy. Later, after several years, I would change my mind by observing some nonsense that arose from this injunction.

Staring me in the eye, with enormous emotional impact he began to tell me that a practice learned from any other source "was worth nothing, would not be effective as far as spiritual achievements are concerned", while other effects would be "just a dangerous illusion in which the ego would be trapped for a long time. "

Inflamed by an absolute faith, he launched into a digression on the value of the "*Guru*" (spiritual Master) a concept that for me remained enigmatic, also because it was attributed to a person whom he had not known directly. Having been initiated into *Kriya* by the legitimate representatives of the organization founded by PY, this teacher was, in the feeling of his heart, a real presence in his life: he was his *Guru*. The same thing happened to those who belonged to his group. Their *Guru* was seen

as the help that God Himself had sent them, so such an event was "the greatest luck that could happen to a human being." The logical consequence – and the friend noted this with great emphasis – was that abandoning this Master, seeking a different spiritual path, was equivalent to "a hateful rejection of the Divine hand, stretched out in benediction."

He asked me to practice my *Kriya* technique in front of him, the one learned from books. He was obviously driven by curiosity and, I suppose, by the hope of verifying a well-rooted prejudice according to which the technique, learned outside the legitimate channels, could not be – due to a particular spiritual law – other than corrupt. He smiled when he saw that I was breathing through my nose. Then he asked me to explain if there was anything I was focusing my attention on during my breath. According to the books read, the energy could be visualized flowing both within the spine or around it. Since PY wrote that a *kriyaban* "mentally directs his life energy to rotate up and down around the six spinal centers", I chose the latter of the two possibilities and this was the version I explained. Moreover, having read in another book that during *Kriya Pranayama* one had to mentally chant *Om* in each *Chakra*, I also added this detail. I could not imagine that PY had decided to simplify the instructions and had taught the other variant in the West by omitting the mental chant of *Om*.

As I explained these details, I saw an intimate satisfaction spread over his face. He evidently did not identify my practice with the *Kriya Pranayama* technique he had learned. The "secret" to which he was bound had therefore not been violated by the authors of the books I had read! Pretending to feel sorry for my natural disillusionment, he informed me in an official tone, that my technique "had nothing to do with *Kriya Pranayama*"!

The situation was really bizarre: now I know that I had just exhibited a technique very similar to *Kriya Pranayama* as taught by *Lahiri Mahasaya*, while he was smiling with a sarcastic expression, one hundred percent sure that I was talking nonsense! He recommended that I send a written description, precise and detailed, of my vicissitudes to the direction of the school, in the hope that they would accept me as a student and one day grant me the sacred initiation into *Kriya Yoga*.

I was dumbfounded by the tone our dialogue was assuming; to reactivate the initial amiability of the meeting I tried to reassure him by talking about the positive effects I had obtained with my practice. This statement had the effect of worsening the situation, giving him the opportunity for a second reprimand, really not completely wrong, but in any case out of place. He made it clear to me that, in the practice of *Kriya*, I should never seek tangible effects; even less bragging about it, because then "I would have lost them". That clever guy, without realizing it, had thrown himself into a clear contradiction: if the results were too important

to risk losing them by telling them, it meant that the technique worked!

Realizing that he had devoted too much of his time to me, a strange metamorphosis occurred in his behavior. It was as if, all of a sudden, he had been invested with a sacred role: he said he would pray for me! For that day, I had lost the game. I promised him that I would follow his advice. In fact, from that moment I gave up my *Pranayama* routine altogether and limited my practice to simple concentration at the point between the eyebrows (*Kutastha*) – as he had suggested.

GROUP MEDITATION

The group of people who practiced *Kriya* in his city met twice a week to practice together. The room dedicated to this activity had basic but pleasant furnishings. Each member contributed to pay the rent so that its use did not depend on the whims of the owner and was devoted exclusively to a spiritual use. I began to take part in these meetings. Listening to Indian spiritual songs, translated and harmonized in Western style and, above all, meditating together was a real joy! Everything seemed heavenly to me – even if the amount of time dedicated to the practice of the techniques was really short: no more than 20 minutes, often only 15. A session of collective practice, of particular inspiration, enriched by devotional songs, took place on the eve of Christmas and lasted for many hours.

At the end of each meditation session we were expected to leave in silence, so I only began to get to know my new friends more closely during the monthly "social" lunch. This was a really nice opportunity to spend a few hours together talking and enjoying each other's company.

Since many of us did not enjoy the approval and even less the support in the practice of *Yoga* techniques from their family, the unique opportunity to be among people with the same ideas and interests should have been an experience of serenity and relaxation. Unfortunately, the pleasantness of the encounters was partly marred by the fact that in such a group one could not talk about anything that came to mind. Those in charge of the organization had strongly recommended not to talk about other spiritual paths or discuss specific details of *Kriya Yoga* techniques. This task was to be reserved only for specially authorized persons and no one in our group was. The need to direct the contents of the conversations on well-defined tracks made it difficult to find a topic of conversation that respected the rules, being, at the same time, interesting. This was certainly not the place for worldly gossip, unsuitable for a spiritual group. So only one topic remained: the beauty of the *Kriya* path and the great luck of having found it!

As can be assumed, after a few "mutual exaltation" meetings, an almost hallucinating boredom began to reign in the group. As a last resort, someone took the risk of making some innocent joke; it was certainly not a

matter of jokes that could offend anyone, but of a moderate use of a sense of humor. Unfortunately this clashed with the devotional attitude held by most of the members and capitulated to their cold reaction.

When you tried to look nice, you got an embarrassed look and a smile that left you cold for the rest of the day. These people seemed unable to show a single shred of true joviality. Remembering those episodes, perhaps they were naturally inclined to depression. In fact their enthusiasm for *Kriya* was lukewarm, and they seemed to be practicing the few techniques they knew as if they were making a sacrifice to atone for the "guilt" of existing.

What struck me negatively in the behavior of some of them was the belief that they were protected by their "*Guru*" and that they experienced dangerous situations with complete tranquility, abandoning all prudence. In my opinion this attitude was really nothing more than a silly superstition.

It was a fact that a consistent recycling process was observed in the group; many members who had enthusiastically been part of it abandoned it with visible relief trying to remove this experience from their memory.

My open temperament allowed me to approach some people and establish a bond that later became true friendship. It was not that easy to find what one might call a free seeker in the spiritual field. Many displayed a devotion that was too charged from an emotional point of view, others, perhaps dreaming of the possibility of expanding our group, seemed to have the sole purpose of raising funds to provide the room for something that eloquently communicated the meaning of its sacred consecration; others just looked like social misfits.

With the ill-concealed purpose of receiving some elucidation on the technique of *Kriya*, on several occasions I tried to discuss what had been my practice of it as I had learned it from books. I was hoping that someone, making some oblique observations on it, would help me to guess what the exact technique of *Kriya Pranayama* consisted of. No "courtship" was able to extract even a crumb of information from them.

While I continued to receive from anyone, even without asking them, lessons in devotion, humility and loyalty, my interest in *Kriya* became a real craving, a fever that consumed me. A *kriyaban* made fun of me and, with undisguised cruelty, said to me: "You will see that they won't even give you *Kriya*, because a devotee does not have to desire a technique with such intensity: God is to be found first of all with devotion and surrender to His will".

I tried to behave like a devoted disciple but deep down I awaited my initiation with unimaginable impatience. Even if I tried my best to convince myself that I was among individuals with the same passions as I

did, I had to admit that the reality was very different!

AN IMPORTANT VISIT IN OUR GROUP

Our group received a visit from an elderly lady who had been in correspondence with PY himself. Thanks to her seriousness, sincerity and loyal behavior, she had received the authorization to help us in the practice of meditation. Her temper was very sweet and she seemed more prone to understanding than censorship.

She showed us how she performed the so-called "*Recharging Exercises*." These exercises were similar to isometric contractions and were practiced while standing; characteristic of them was the fact that the *Prana* was directed in all parts of the body through the force of concentration.

By the will of PY the technique of *Kriya Pranayama* should always have been combined with two introductory techniques: *Hong So* and *Om*. The first calms the breath and the mind; the second concerns listening to the inner sounds produced by the *Chakras* that merge into the sound of *Om*.

This lady explained the *Hong So* technique to us. She pointed out that, despite its apparent simplicity, it was not at all easy; but, with an encouraging smile, she added: "The technique contains everything you need to get in touch with the Divine."

She then dwelt on the technique of listening to inner sounds (called the *Om technique*.)⁵ She explained that PY had explained the teaching of the Trinity in a very interesting way. According to him, *Om* is the 'Amen' of the Bible – the **Holy Spirit**, the "witness" sound of the vibration of the energy that sustains the universe. The *Om* technique makes it possible to perceive this vibration. Thanks to this technique it is possible to be guided towards the experience of the "**Son**" – the Divine awareness present within the aforementioned energy vibration. At the end of one's spiritual journey, one can reach the highest reality: the "**Father**" – the Divine awareness that resides beyond all that exists in the universe.

The clarification received by the lady was characterized by such a feeling of sacredness that it stayed with me in the following months and helped me to get through the initial phase of the practice where it seemed unlikely that the inner sounds would appear. Instead the results obtained were very concrete.

Now, as I try to recall my first contact with the sound of *Om*, I rediscover the memory of that ardent love for the Divine, which seemed so

⁵ This technique does not belong to those included in the original *Kriya Yoga*, wherein the internal sound perception happens without closing the ears. It is not an invention by PY, it had been plainly described in the books of classical *Yoga*, called *Nada Yoga* – "the *Yoga* of the sound." It is a good preparation for *Kriya* since it teaches the importance of passive attitude ("perceiving") versus active attitude ("to do".)

solid in those days and which later disappeared for several years when I decided to do a research on the "*Original Kriya*." But we will talk about this later.

In those days I lived like a hermit. I practiced meditation in a cold, dimly lit room. The rainy days and early winter evenings encouraged me to seek this isolation by strengthening the resolve to kindle an inner sun through meditation. A few weeks of assiduous practice passed without any result, until one day I became aware of a clear inner sound. It happened after ten minutes of calm effort, just as, after having lost myself in some sweet reverie, I was returning to full awareness.⁶

It was like the hum of a mosquito. Listening carefully, it turned into the faint sound of many small tinkling bells. Then it became the tolling of a distant bell that echoed in the sunset from the deep green of wooded hills. It reached me weakly from unfathomable distances. Light, sweet as a shower of petals, it knocked softly on the doors of my heart, giving me total satisfaction and a sense of relief, as if the spiritual path had come to its fulfillment. Memories of my childhood vibrated on the periphery of my awareness without disturbing that state of deep recollection.

In difficult and unfortunate times in my life, I had always felt a sense of protection, like a broad, comfortable smile surrounding me. The sound I was hearing now brought me the same sweet feeling of comfort. It contained within itself every Beauty encountered in life. It was the golden thread around which all the experiences of love, the most involving, the most exalting, had blossomed like splendid crystals. The healing of old wounds came with true understanding. A blue, boundless stillness softly gripped my heart with fingers of bliss. What had been impossible to accomplish and the lack of which it was so cruel to accept, materialized real and true before me.

In the following days I became totally absorbed in this new practice. A devotion never experienced before arose spontaneously, crossed the wall of the psychological sphere and made life and spiritual experience indistinguishable. Reality seemed transfigured to me – like when in Winter a soft blanket of snow makes all roughness disappear.

Unfortunately, I learned the hard way that one must never voluntarily detach oneself from this state of grace. Months later, in fact, during a period in which I wanted to relax and enjoy life, I decided to voluntarily interrupt that state of grace, as if it constituted an impediment to being fully sociable. I did not realize that this apparently harmless and instinctive "betrayal" would make me unable to tune into that dimension for a very long time. Incredulous, after a few days I felt desperately alienated from that sweet reality. Among the people I felt like someone who has landed on

⁶ To be lost in a "reverie" state and to return suddenly to the awareness that I was losing time, happened often.

another continent and is in the midst of environments that signify nothing. I tried in vain to rediscover the great emotion that arises from listening to inner sounds. I sought that attunement for several months until my soul agreed to sincerely reflect on the reasons that had led me to the spiritual path: to change my life forever. Now I saw that my stupid decision to detach myself from contact with the *Om* vibration had been a huge mistake.

KRIYA YOGA INITIATION

Finally, the time came when I was able to formally request the Initiation Technique of *Kriya* by correspondence. Four months passed, every day I hoped to receive the much desired material, finally an envelope arrived. I opened it with an expectation that I cannot describe: I was deeply disappointed because it only contained introductory material. From the index of this material I understood that the actual technique would come after four weeks. So, for another month, I would have to study the usual nursery rhymes I knew by heart.

Instead, it happened that, in the meantime, two ministers from the PY organization visited our country and I was able to participate in an Initiation ceremony.

Those who, like me, were ready to receive Initiation, were about a hundred. We found ourselves in a beautiful room, rented for the occasion at a very high cost, decorated with many flowers, how many I've never seen in my life, not even in the most sumptuous weddings! The introduction to the ceremony took place in a sumptuous way. About thirty people, wearing a sober uniform, entered the room in a row, with a solemn attitude and hands folded in prayer. It was explained to me that those people were part of the local group whose group leader was a stylist who had prepared the choreography for that triumphal entry. The two Ministers who had recently arrived from overseas advanced with a modest and disoriented air behind the procession. The actual ceremony began.

I accepted without objection that a promise of eternal fidelity was required not only to the *Guru* PY but also to a chain formed by five other Masters: Lahiri Mahasaya was an intermediate link while PY was the so-called *Guru-preceptor*, or the one who would partially assume the weight of our *Karma*.

It would have been really strange if no one had doubts about this latest event. I remember that a friend asked me if PY – not being able to confirm it, being a resident in the astral worlds – had really accepted her as a "disciple", consequently also taking the burden of her *Karma*. To avoid that she impoverished the enjoyment of this fascinating ceremony with such thoughts, I reassured her that she was undoubtedly accepted.

They explained to us that Christ belonged to this chain of Masters

and that he had once appeared to *Babaji* (Lahiri Mahasaya's *Guru*) asking him to send some emissaries to the West to spread the teaching of *Kriya*.

This story did not cause me any perplexity. Maybe I didn't want to think about it. Considering that the mission of spreading *Kriya* originated from Christ himself was a very nice idea for me. On the other hand, I was too eager to hear the explanation of the technique that would soon take place to pay attention to this fact.

The introductory speech went on in a suggestive way. The *Kriya* technique embodied the most effective blessings of God to His privileged creature, the human being, endowed, unlike animals, with seven *Chakras*. My mind was in a state of enormous expectation for what I had desired with my whole being and for which I had been seriously preparing for months. It was not what could be called a 'sacrament' that I had decided to receive to safeguard a family tradition; what was about to happen represented the crowning of a definitive choice! My heart was immensely and perfectly happy anticipating the joy that would come from the practice of *Kriya*.

When we came to the explanation of *Kriya Pranayama*, I discovered that I already knew the technique! It consisted of a deepening of *Ujjayi Pranayama*. It was the technique of the *Kundalini Breath* that I had found long ago in my esoteric readings and which prescribes that the energetic current flow, with the help of the breath, inside the spine.

I have already explained that I had not seriously considered this procedure since PY in his writings had written that in *Kriya* the energy revolved "around the *Chakras*, along an elliptical circuit". Now I saw that the term 'around' was inappropriate and that there was no elliptical circuit. Furthermore, why had so many people absolutely insisted that entering the organization I should abandon all other procedures and practice only the techniques received from this last source? The practice of *Ujjayi* had brought so many blessings in my life, why had I been so strongly conditioned in my choices that I had agreed to abandon it?

The explanation of the *Maha Mudra* and *Jyoti Mudra* techniques (this school did not use the more common term *Yoni*) concluded the technical instructions. Every detail of the techniques was explained in such a way that it did not admit the slightest variation and, in addition, a specific routine was strongly recommended. If the slightest doubt arose as to the correctness of a certain detail, no one was encouraged – not even vaguely – to attempt an experiment on their own and draw conclusions. The only "correct" action was to contact the school management, expose the problem, and receive appropriate advice. This, in fact, was what I always did. I learned to interact only with "authorized" people; I was looking very seriously for their judgment as if it were given by perfect beings who could

not be wrong. I believed that they were "channels" through which the blessings of the *Guru* flowed. Furthermore, I was deeply convinced that – even if they did not admit it out of humility – they had already reached the highest level of spiritual realization.

[III]

After initiation into *Kriya*, I followed the advice of my organization to practice the two techniques *Hong So* and *Om* before *Kriya Pranayama*.

With the first technique the breath would have calmed down and this would have created a good level of concentration. Then we moved on to listening to the inner sounds. Then there was the *Maha Mudra*. Finally, returning to the immobile position and trying to restore the state of sacredness, *Kriya Pranayama* began in strict compliance with all the instructions. After *Jyoti Mudra*, the *Kriya* routine would end with ten minutes of pure concentration in *Kutastha*.

In my practical experience, the two preliminary techniques did not receive the attention they deserved. During the execution of the *Hong-so* technique, the thought that I would soon have to interrupt it to switch to the *Om* technique created a feeling of disturbance, limiting my total abandonment to its beauty. The same happened with the *Om* technique, which was interrupted to practice *Maha Mudra*.

The *Om* listening technique was in itself a "complete" universe and led to mystical experience, so the act of interrupting it was something worse than a simple disturbance. This interruption was incompatible with all logic. It was as if, having recognized with pleasant surprise a friend in the crowd, I entertained myself with him, then, suddenly, I turned my back to him, I mingled with the crowd in the hope of experiencing the surprise of meeting him again in a short time to return to the suspended conversation.

The sound of *Om* represented the mystical experience itself, the Goal I was looking for. Why would I have to interrupt that sublime tuning and then regain it through another technique that, however, did not give me immediate and tangible results like the *Om* technique? Was it because *Kriya Pranayama* was a higher procedure? I did not understand why it should be considered "higher."

Certainly *Pranayama* had given me a great result: before the *Kundalini awakening* experience it was the only thing I had practiced. But now the *Om* listening technique made me enter the spiritual dimension. It was not a rational choice to interrupt it to practice *Pranayama*!

I forced myself to this absurd choice for an extremely long period. Back then, the thought of using logic and radically changing the routine

seemed to me an act of stupid arrogance. Such was the power of that madness which in our group was called "loyalty"! Unfortunately, I must admit that I had become like one of those animals fed by man who lose the power to be self-sufficient.

When I tried to discuss this problem with other *kriyabans*, I encountered enormous and unreasonable resistance. There were some who were not satisfied with their practice but planned to improve it in the future, while others could not understand what I was saying.

A lady who had almost become part of my family pretended to listen to me attentively; in the end she said brutally that she already had a *Guru* and did not feel the need for another. Her remark hurt me deeply as my intention was only to have a rational interview. What friendship can exist between two people when one is expressed so abruptly?

It was the succession of similar episodes that confirmed the idea that, having not been encouraged to trust the clarity of self-observation, many of my *kriyaban* friends did nothing but mechanically perform the daily ritual of the *Kriya* session almost as if to put in peace their conscience. With the exception of one person (who really harbored some strange ideas about the spiritual path, to the point that one day I thought that he might be mentally unstable) these new *kriyaban* friends seemed to censor my excessive interest in how to use the techniques in the best way, stating that devotion was far more important. Often they referred to a concept that in my opinion was out of place in the field of *Yoga*: the supreme value of loyalty towards P.Y. and its organization.

Well, one day I decided to use my brain and change the routine. This routine was inspired by Patanjali's teaching. I decided that the two techniques *Hong So* and *Om* should be practiced either in the final part of the routine or never.

Having made the spine more sensitive with the practice of *Kriya Pranayama*, I practiced *Hong So* in the spine. [This means 'observing' the breath as if it were moving not in and out of the lungs but up and down along the spine.]

I cannot describe the emotion and the sense of sacredness that characterized my practice of *Kriya Pranayama* from that moment on. During the day or before sitting down to practice, I often repeated as a *Mantra* the phrase (quoted in PY's Autobiography) by Lalla Yogiswari:

"What acid of sorrow have I not drunk? Countless my rounds of birth and death. Lo! naught but nectar in my cup quaffed by the art of breath."

This beautiful image intensified my enthusiasm, strengthening the determination to ceaselessly perfect my *Kriya* practice.

Note on Patanjali's teaching

Patanjali was a pioneer in the art of rationally considering the mystical path, trying to identify a universal, physiological direction to events that would explain why a certain phenomenon inherent in the spiritual path precedes another and necessarily follows another. Its extreme synthesis could be criticized, or, due to its temporal distance, be difficult to understand; in any case, it is of extraordinary importance. Patanjali made a synthesis of the spiritual path by identifying eight steps in it: *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, *Samadhi*. Practically useless is the definition of *Yama* and *Niyama*. *Yama*: self-control (non-violence, non-lying, non-stealing, non-lust and non-attachment). *Niyama*: religious observances (cleansing, contentment, discipline, study of the Self, and surrender to the Supreme God).

How can a beginner understand what the "Study of the Self" is? It seems clear to me that moral rules are not to be interpreted as premises for starting the practice of *Yoga*, but are the consequences of serious spiritual effort.

Regarding *Asana* (body position) *Patanjali* explains that it must be stable and comfortable. Nothing else says about it. What is important is that there is no mention of preliminary concentration and meditation exercises before *Pranayama*.

The two interesting concepts for those who practice *Kriya* are *Pranayama* and *Pratyahara*. They are respectively: the regulation of *Prana* obtained through the repetition of particular breathing patterns and the process of internalization of awareness that disconnects from external reality. The three further phases, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, *Samadhi*, mean respectively: concentration on a physical or abstract object, contemplation of the essential nature of that object, prolongation of this contemplation in a constant stream of consciousness until getting lost in it.

Those who practice *Kriya Yoga* interpret "concentration on an object" as concentration on the *Chakras*; the "contemplation of the essential nature of such an object" as immersing oneself in the sweetness that comes from them; the "getting lost in it" as the unlimited happiness that comes from reaching the final ecstatic state. For me the teaching of *Patanjali* lies in this.

CHAPTER 3

BREATHLESS STATE

DIFFICULTIES WITH THE TEACHINGS OF MY ORGANIZATION

A couple of years passed by. The time came to receive the *Higher Kriyas* through the correspondence course. I ran into some difficulties with them.

Among the *kriyabans* of the meditation group I did not see a great interest in such techniques. I asked a friend of mine, a devout *kriyaban* who had received *Kriya* initiation many years ago and had once lived at the headquarters of our organization, if she had received the *Second Kriya*. She didn't seem to understand the question. Therefore I reminded her that a disciple of *Lahiri Mahasaya*, *Swami Pranabananda*, had accompanied the moment of his death with the practice of the *Second Kriya*. She was visibly altered, saying that the quotation clearly referred to the technique of *Kriya Pranayama*: one breath, then another and this "second breath" was, according to her, the "*Second Kriya*"! I felt faint: I looked at her in a mild but intense way. I had the impression that the very idea of another technique to be added to those already received and practiced daily, bothered her. It was as if she felt that she had made such a great effort in getting used to the daily practice of *First Kriya* that she did not feel like facing an even greater effort. I believe that to this day she has remained firm in her conviction.

Unfortunately, the lessons with the *Higher Kriyas* contained ambiguous pieces. Just to give an example, PY wrote that in order to awaken *Kundalini* it was important to practice *Kechari Mudra* regularly. But the instruction on how to make such a *Mudra* was nowhere to be found.

I contacted the elderly lady who was officially invested with the role of "Meditation counselor", the same kind lady who had taught me the *Om* meditation technique. She was unable to help me clear up my doubts. She too had learned these techniques in writing since, unfortunately, after PY's Mahasamadhi, direct initiations were never given. Recognizing that she had some doubts about their correct execution, she regretted not having her *Higher Kriyas* checked by Ministers who were direct disciples of PY, despite having had many opportunities to do so.

An aristocratic-looking lady revealed to me that she had received initiation into the so-called *Higher Kriyas* a long time ago. Full of enthusiasm, I widened my eyes. She said that she had felt so unworthy that she had put them aside and, after some time, had forgotten them.

"*Forgotten!*" I didn't believe my ears. This abomination was inconceivable to me. Her self-satisfied ignorance, passed off as humility or who knows what form of overabundant devotion, passed the limits of decency. When I objected that her behavior seemed a manifestation of indifference to the lofty teachings of her *Guru*, she looked at me as if my impertinence had violated an inviolable prohibition: never enter the intimate dimension of a person's *Sadhana*. She replied by saying that what she had was enough for her, then abruptly broke off the conversation.

I wrote to my *Kriya* school management to arrange an appointment with one of its representatives, a Minister who would soon be visiting my country to give *Kriya Yoga* initiation. I asked for this interview because I really needed it. It is not in my character to disturb anyone for trivial matters. I'm sure it would have taken the Minister a couple of minutes at the most to answer me. I was looking forward to that appointment with great anticipation.

A SAD EPISODE

Introduced to him by the "Meditation counselor", the Minister assured me that he would clarify my doubts as soon as possible. Over the next few days, I was dismayed when I realized that he kept postponing our meeting for no valid reason. Since I had decided not to give up, we finally met.

I went through a truly unpleasant experience. I believed that hypocrisy, bureaucracy, formalities, small falsehoods and subtle violence against the honesty of others were totally alien to those who dedicated their lives to practicing and teaching *Kriya*, instead I had the impression of meeting a manager who had other more important things in his head and he was very irritable. He was adamant not to tell me about *Kechari Mudra* and as far as the *Third* and *Fourth Kriya* were concerned, he abruptly advised me to limit my practice to *First Kriya* techniques. He stated that I was too agitated and this showed that I did not practice *Kriya* well. I replied that I would definitely take his advice into consideration, nevertheless, I wanted to see how to move my head correctly in order to practice these techniques in the hypothetical future.

Annoyed – considering my answer an insolence – he hastily showed me these movements and invited me to address my questions, in written form, to the school management and, as he said this, he got up, making the act of leaving. I found myself in front of a "wall" and the refusal to continue the interview was absolute.

I had always faith and respect for PY's organization; I had studied all the related literature as if I had to prepare for a university exam. Finally I had asked this organization only one thing: that this, so much loved, jewel that is *Kriya*, be explained to me in its entirety. Why had the Minister reacted in

such a way?

I found myself in an atrocious mental and emotional condition. I wondered what good was a school that didn't do its best to clarify every teaching given. Why did our ministers travel around the world, if not to show students directly how to practice what was learned only by correspondence?

Why should I have felt guilty and unsuitable for the *Kriya* path, just for having dared to ask (firmly but kindly) for a practical demonstration? I couldn't let the whole thing go and I was clearly upset. Those who saw me immediately after this meeting said I was unrecognizable. Among my friends, a lady with a honeyed voice commented that I got a real strafing from our *Guru* – in her opinion, until then I had had the attitude of one who feels too confident, now I had to learn to accept without discussing the words of a minister.

Yet part of me was enjoying the whole situation. I knew for a fact that this destructive experience would somehow turn into something positive, crucial to my path. I was too in love with the *Kriya* path to be discouraged by any difficulty.

This made me calmer and more serene. But there are also childish thoughts that arise in us when we find ourselves in a confused and difficult to accept situation. The dark thought occurred to me that this man, having returned to the management of the PY organization, might speak unfavorably of me, saying something that could decrease the likelihood for me to receive those much desired clarifications in the future. I was afraid that my idyllic relationship with my *Kriya* organization had been compromised.

The lady "Meditation counselor", who was not present on that occasion but met the Minister in another city, blamed me for disturbing the Minister's peace of mind. I wrote her a letter full of bitterness, indirectly insulting her. She replied very firmly that this letter had ended our friendship. Later she toned down her attitude and she invited me to her house to talk about what had happened.

First, I expressed my irrevocable determination to explore all possible sources to clarify my doubts. I talked about my plan to leave for India and she started mumbling something about India being no guarantee of authenticity. She told me that recently some *kriyabans* had met (in a well known *Ashram* closely connected with PY's life story) a *Swami* who gave them "pseudo *Kriya*" techniques which were, in his opinion, some meaningless, others dangerous.

She said there were many unauthorized teachers who presented themselves as loyal disciples of PY. With fervent imagination he compared them to spiders who smeared the honey of the *Guru's* love to attract

devotees to themselves who became their prey.

She spoke to me in particular of a disciple of PY who had been part of the management of the organization, then he had started his own business by opening a new school of *Kriya*. She considered him a "traitor."

The lady could have continued to talk practically indefinitely when with a sentence that came out of my instinct I froze her: "If I were to receive a teaching on *Kriya* from the worst criminal in the world, I would be able to transform it into gold. And if this teaching were adulterated, I would have the intuition to rebuild it in its integrity as it was originally."

She said, sighing, that I was dangerously going to lose the grace of my *Guru*-disciple relationship. To make me understand what it means to receive instructions from a real *Guru*, she told me what happened when a *kriyaban* decided to leave his *Guru* PY's *Ashram* and look for another Master. The *Guru* moved to stop him when he heard a voice internally – that of God himself, she added – urging him not to interfere with the disciple's freedom. PY obeyed and in a flash of intuition he foresaw all the future incarnations of his disciple, those in which he would be lost, in which he would continue to search – in the midst of innumerable and unspeakable sufferings, passing from one error to another – the same spiritual path that he was now leaving. Eventually, he would necessarily return to the same path. The lady said that PY specified to some close disciples the number of incarnations that this immense and desolate "journey" would last – approximately thirty!

The moral of this story was clear, something no one could escape from: I didn't have to look elsewhere or I would have lost myself in a labyrinth of enormous suffering and who knows when I would have found the right path again. It was then that I turned my attention to PY's photo, taken on the same day as his death. It had been framed with great care; flowers and a packet of incense were placed in front of it. In those moments of silence, I seemed to see as if a tear was about to form in PY's sweet eyes (it wasn't a weird feeling, other people reported the same impression to me). I related this remark to her, she became serious, and looking into the distance towards an indefinite point, she sighed heavily: "This impression, take it as a warning; the *Guru* is not happy with you"! There was no doubt that she wasn't joking at all.

In that moment, I realized how PY was a "presence" in her life, even though she had never met him physically! I let my gaze rest on the bunch of lilies of the valley neatly arranged in a small vase in front of PY's photo. We had bought them at the train station right after I arrived in his city. She had explained to me that she never skimmed on fresh flowers to her "*Guru*." Although a stranger to all this, I was enchanted by this idyll. How her life must have been filled with sweet comfort! I knew that if I wanted to feel devotion with such intensity, I would have a great job to do: develop a

stable inner tranquility, bow to my favored form of the Divine, and repeat this action of inner surrender with total sincerity every day of my life.

Although she admired the seriousness with which I walked down the path – unlike other lukewarm and hesitant people who came to her solely to be recharged with a motivation they could not find in themselves – she was disappointed that the devotion she felt for her *Guru* was totally alien to me. She could not even relieve my immense thirst for knowledge of the art of *Kriya*. Looking into her beautiful sad eyes, I had the clear impression that she was in permanent anticipation that I was acting "disloyal" to the *Guru* or the organization in some way.

The Minister of my organization with whom I had clashed on at least one point was right: I was by no means calm. The search for technical explanations made me as tense as a coiled spring. While I wanted to remain faithful to my *Kriya* organization, I did not accept vetoes. I wanted to know *Kriya* to perfection and no one could hold me back anymore, with no argument.

After a few days, the feeling of having witnessed the senseless whim of a man in a position of power gave way to a different consideration. Most likely that Minister gave me the same discipline that he had received during his years as a postulant. A lady who had known him in that distant period described him to me as a very curious *kriyaban* who often asked senior Ministers technical questions. Knowing the rules of monastic discipline, I was sure that his questions had not always been answered promptly.

MY REACTION: STUDYING ALL THE MATERIALS I COULD FIND

The desire to gain a deeper understanding of PY's writings on *Kriya Yoga* took a particular direction. I knew three names of his direct disciples who had quarreled with the school management and who later set out on their own. I was hoping to find keys in their writings that would help me clarify my doubts. I bought all the material published by them, including recordings of lectures given by one of them. I hoped that to prove their level of Self-realization, they had elaborated the thought of PY through the direct experience of the various phases of *Kriya* and had prepared a good quality didactic material for those who turned to them while neglecting the main source.

Well, the first disciple seemed an expert in remembering even the most insignificant episodes of his *Guru's* life while in the didactic material he shared there was no mention of the *higher Kriyas*; the second gave a more professional idea, he was gifted with a didactic spirit, but from the material he provided almost nothing new emerged. In the literature of the third disciple – surprising and precious in that, having encountered the

tragedy of mental illness, he was able to give an impressive account of it – I found an enlightened sentence on the role of *Kechari Mudra*: everything else was devastatingly banal. The secrets, if these three disciples ever had any, were well guarded!

I also tackled the reading of some books written no longer by PY disciples but by *Lahiri Mahasaya* disciples.⁷ These were commentaries on some sacred scriptures attributed to *Lahiri Mahasaya*. *P. Bhattacharya* his disciple, printed those interpretations. These books had recently been translated into English. These texts disappointed me a lot.

Their value, from an exegetical point of view, was almost nil. It seemed almost impossible to me that those interpretations really came from *Lahiri Mahasaya*: I could not see the same practical wisdom and enormous realization that he expressed in his journals and letters.

I formed this idea: *Lahiri Mahasaya* had verbally annotated certain sacred texts of the *Indian* tradition. Perhaps, reading those verses, he was transported by the strength of his acumen, completely forgot the texts to comment and, inspired, spoke widely and freely on the subtleties of *Kriya*. Most likely what he said on that occasion was taken as a specific commentary on those texts. It is possible that in publishing those comments, the editor complemented them by adding portions born of his own understanding.

Months later, Mrs "*Meditation counselor*" learned that I had read a "*forbidden book*" one written by a disciple of PY who had left the organization. Not only that, I had given this book to a couple of friends! Well in a letter to a friend of mine, she referred to me as "one who stabs his *Guru* in the back and distributes daggers for others to do the same"! She concluded by writing that "intelligence is a double-edged sword: it can be used to eliminate the bubo of ignorance but also to brutally block the lifeblood that sustains the spiritual path!"

Her reaction was so flustered that it didn't hurt me at all. She had acted on the wave of an unstoppable emotion. **Decades of conditioning had affected her common sense**. I felt a sense of tenderness for her and made me smile as I imagined what her mood might have been when she wrote that letter. Seeing that her unfortunate expectations of me had materialized, I believe that her expression was first serious and then, in the end, calm and serene like that of one who savors a sweet, intimate satisfaction. She could well say that she had foreseen all this, or that she had sensed my ... " betrayal. "

⁷ The very interesting book **Purana Purusha by Ashoke Kumar Chatterjee** was not yet published.

STUDY THE LESSONS AGAIN

I then decided to study once more the correspondence course received by the organization. I made it a habit to meet up with some *kriyaban* friends, read some crucial pieces of these lessons with them, and walk around discussing the various topics they covered. Our main interest was to find inspiration there that could help us perfect our *Kriya* practice. Our attempt was in vain – it was like getting blood out of a stone.

In addition to the instructions on the meditation techniques of *Kriya Yoga*, other topics were extensively covered in these lessons: how to behave with friends, how to manage a relationship as a couple, how to choose a job that does not hinder one's spiritual development, how to organize a good vegetarian diet... There were also some esoteric teachings which could not be considered necessary for the practice of *Kriya Yoga* but for some reason they were taken into consideration.

I realized that I had focused too much on these latter topics such as how to develop telepathy, how to be able to send energy to obtain *pranic* healing, how to recognize friends from previous lives... These teachings were accompanied by an invitation to prudence and caution. Yet I realized that I had put them into practice with an attitude devoid of all caution and discrimination. I had chosen those particular patterns of behavior towards which my emotions guided me. I acted believing myself supported by "Above", imagining that the blessings and strength of the *Guru* were with me.

Slowly my delusional dream began to disintegrate and I now perceived a clear failure. This was a big blow to me. I was struggling to accept it; I wanted to believe that mine was an apparent failure, but as time went on the evidence told me that I had neither cured nor helped anyone, in any way. I had made a fool of myself and, moreover, disturbed other people's peace and privacy.

Right in the very vacuous field of "past lives", it seemed to me that I had done nothing but use my imagination to create various mental films, convincing myself that I had lived them in the distant past.

Slipping into a state of bewilderment, I was unable for months to trace the thread of a single coherent thought.

Very slowly came the understanding that everything in the material studied that did not concern the explanation of meditation techniques or advice on how to practice such techniques was confined to the realm of body and mind. So from a spiritual point of view those teachings were, for me, USELESS. Although harmless to many people, I perceived them as a heavy material that had confused my being. I began to desire with all my

heart a clean spiritual path that had nothing to do with strengthening the realm of the mind, a path that would lead, without unnecessary frills, to calm the thought process and bring it to a state of silence and transparency. It was with this desire that I approached *Japa*, or that practice which religions call *Prayer*.

THE IDEA OF JAPA ENTERS MY LIFE

With a desperate need for tranquility, I tried to rely on the simplest possible *Kriya* routine and to live with an internalized consciousness. I tried to carry out the well-known instruction of **resolutely maintaining an impartial attitude towards pleasant and unpleasant events, keeping myself as a detached "witness"**. Supported by the enthusiasm for this new purpose, I managed to achieve a state that seemed ideal, good, but after a few days I felt unbearably stressed as if everything were a fiction, a miserable play. In fact, **this teaching was impossible to carry out**. Only an "enlightened" person can in fact live in such a high state of consciousness.

It was then that I leafed through a book that dealt with the life and, in particular, the spiritual experiences of **Swami Ramdas** (1884-1963), the Indian saint who traveled the length and breadth of India incessantly repeating the *Mantra* "*Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram Om*." Discovering the simplicity of his life and the grandeur of his experience was very inspiring; his photo and the almost childlike simplicity of his smile kindled in my heart a great admiration for this person.

He lived a completely normal life, experiencing the ups and downs of the life of a householder. He researched what the true meaning of life was and felt the need to embark on the spiritual path. His father initiated him into the *Ram Mantra*, explaining that repeating it relentlessly would achieve the perfect peace he aspired to. It was then that Ramdas gave up the householder life and went in search of God as a beggar *Sadhu*. The *Mantra* "*Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram Om*" was always on his lips. In addition to the practice of *Japa*, he adopted the discipline of looking at all people as forms of *Ram* (God) and accepting every event as coming from the will of God.

In a short time the *Mantra* disappeared from his lips and entered his heart. He clearly perceived the Spiritual Eye at the point between the eyebrows. He soon reached the stage where abiding in the light of the Spirit became a permanent experience. *Swami Ramdas* obtained the *Mahasamadhi* in 1963. His teaching was extremely simple:

"Repeat the one name 'Ram' at all times of the day and at nights when you are awake. You may be sure that you will not feel lonely or miserable as long as you are uttering that glorious name. Where this name is sounded,

or meditated upon, there resides no sorrow, no anxiety – nay, not even death.

Utter Rama's name any time, amid all of life's distractions, whenever there is a momentary return of your consciousness to Self-awareness. When this happens, feel the ensuing joy and concentrate on it as long as possible. Perfect your surrender to God, when facing every event. At night, when free from worldly duties, devote yourself to intense practice of *Japa*. "

Well, why couldn't I also use his method, passing through it the various stages of internalization which are universally well defined?

I tried to imitate his example. I spent three very beautiful days. I remember moments of ecstasy that filled me with delight. I had tears of joy as I sat on a bench in the public park whispering my *Mantra*. However, I stopped practicing because the effort was too great. By aiming too high (staying constant in *Continuous Prayer*) I ran the risk of developing an aversion to this practice, losing it for a long time. It was necessary to use some wisdom and recharge myself with inspiration.

The writings of *Mère (The Mother)* and *Satprem* entered my life at the right moment.

The Mother was a disciple of *Sri Aurobindo* and, after his death in 1951, continued her research. From 1958 until his death in 1973, *The Mother* recounted her extraordinary exploration to *Satprem*. Their interviews are transcribed in *Mother's Agenda* (6000 pages in 13 volumes). I studied not only her *Agenda* but also *Sri Aurobindo, the Adventure of Consciousness* and *Mother or the Divine Materialism* both written by *Satprem*. It was a revelation!

I would like to clarify how it happened that *The Mother* aroused my enthusiasm by helping me to make *Japa* a constant reality in my life. I also want to communicate how *The Mother* exercised an action in my life which is like what in India is called "Initiation. "

Mother's thought had nothing to do with philosophy. It was new, totally new. It was something never heard before, I dare say "irreverent". *The Mother* reasoned like a Westerner and treated the themes of Indian spirituality in a language that was both lyrical and rational, and beautiful to the highest degree of excellence. *The Mother* voiced my most intimate convictions in an euphorically vivid way. Sometimes I discovered her writings as a kind of revolution, an inversion of values.

There were two most fascinating concepts that shocked me and saved me from the condition I was in.

The first concept concerned his commentary on Sri Aurobindo's aphorism # 70: "Examine thyself without pity, then thou wilt be more charitable and pitying to others." Commenting on it she wrote:

The need to be virtuous is the great obstacle to true self-giving. This is the origin of Falsehood and even more the very source of hypocrisy – the refusal to accept to take upon oneself one's own share of the burden of difficulties.

Do not try to appear virtuous. See how much you are united, one with everything, that is anti-divine. Take your share of the burden, accept yourselves to be impure and false and in that way you will be able to take up the Shadow and offer it. And in so far as you are capable of taking it and offering it, then things will change. Do not try to be among the pure. Accept to be with those who are in darkness and give it all with total love.

I felt a burst of joy reading this comment. Saying, on another occasion: "**Morality is the great obstacle on the spiritual path**", she emphasized the value of not trying at any cost to become pure in the eyes of others, but to **behave in harmony with the truth of one's being**. According to her, everyone should recognize their dark side, accept the fact that in the depths of their being there is stirring the same substance that in some has developed into a way of life judged to be deplorable or criminal by society.

The second concept concerned his way of approaching the subject of *Japa*. She said that undertaking the repetition of a *Mantra* was a spontaneous and natural action for her: **she did not receive a solemn initiation**. She related how during the screening of a film in *Sri Aurobindo's Ashram* she listened to a devotional chant: *Om Namo Bhagavateh* and wondered what would happen if she repeated it during her daily meditation. He did so and the result was extraordinary. He reported that:

"It (the *Mantra*) coagulates something: all the cellular life becomes one solid, compact mass, in a tremendous concentration – with a single vibration. At the place of all the usual vibrations of the body, there is now only one single vibration. It becomes as hard as a diamond, a single massive concentration, as if all the cells of the body had ... I became stiff from it. I was so stiff that I was one single mass." [This quotation is drawn from *Mother's Agenda*.]

During the day the *Mantra* became a sweet presence:

"On the days when I have no special preoccupations or difficulties (days I could call normal, when I am normal), everything I do, all the movements

of this body, all, all the words I utter, all the gestures I make, are accompanied and upheld by or lined, as it were, with this *Mantra*: *Om Namō Bhagavateh... Om Namō Bhagavateh...* , all the time, all the time, all the time."

In many parts of *The Mother's Agenda*, *Satprem* and *The Mother* discuss how the *Mantra* calms the people around the one who practices it, creating an atmosphere of such intensity that disharmonies cease to exist:

"*Mantra* has a great action: it can prevent an accident. It simply springs forth in a flash, all of a sudden: "It has to spring up without thinking, without calling: it should issue forth from the being spontaneously, like a reflex, exactly like a reflex."

The Mother was able to notice the difference between those who have a *Mantra* and those who don't.

"With those who have no *Mantra*, even if they have a strong habit of meditation or concentration, something around them remains hazy and vague, whereas *Japa* imparts to those who practice it with a kind of precision, a kind of solidity: an armature. They become galvanized, as it were".

THE BREATHLESS STATE

One day I received a Catholic rosary from a colleague of mine who had just returned from a pilgrimage to *Medjugorje*. I took it with me on a walk in the countryside and decided to use it; the *Mantra* I chose to repeat was that of Swami Ramdas: *Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram Om*.

I practiced it aloud for about 108 repetitions, using the rosary twice [A Catholic rosary is made of 60 beads; I later bought a 108 grain *Mala*.]

The sound of the *Mantra*, which I had already heard in a recording of spiritual chants, was very pleasant. Since the choice of my *Mantra* was born of a clear predilection, I loved to caress its vibration, prolong it on my lips, make it vibrate in my chest and charge it with all the aspiration of my heart. My attitude was not that of a devotee begging the Divine for something, but that of a man who knows he is close to his goal.

In this way, a sincere act of 'devotion' was born from my heart. 'Devotion' understood as thanks to a reality superior to my ego towards whose beauty I remained as if enchanted.

Even though I felt a little lightheaded at times, I kept my resolve to complete my 108 reps in a low tone of voice.

Nothing in particular was done during the rest of the day: there were no spiritual readings, no devotional songs ... In the evening I retired to my room to practice my *Kriya* session. I felt a great calm in me and around me but nothing suggested that after a few minutes I would experience something capable of changing my life.

During *mental Pranayama*, as I moved up and down along the spine, I distinctly felt that the life of my cells was supported by fresh energy which did not come from the inhaled air. This sensation was calmly enjoyable and I continued undisturbed in my practice. My awareness remained stationary for a while on each *Chakra* like a bee attracted to the nectar of flowers, hovering upon each in great delight. The more I relaxed, the more I became simultaneously aware of the *Chakras* and the physical body. The perception of an inner light and total mental transparency was the sign that a new state of consciousness was establishing itself.

The breath, which in the meantime had become very, very short, finally reached stillness, like a pendulum gently reaching the point of equilibrium. My mind had calmed down completely. I had achieved perfect stillness and, at a certain moment, I found that I was completely breathless. This condition lasted several minutes, without any feeling of discomfort: there was not even a throb of surprise, or the thought: "Finally I have it!"

A calm euphoria could be felt beyond the confines of the mind: the certainty of finally having found something stable and immutable within the evanescent flow of existence – which sometimes seems to have the consistency of an infinite sequence of reflections on the water.

A memory emerged. Some time ago I had read *Mother's* experience when she met *Sri Aurobindo*. *The Mother* related that she sat next to *Sri Aurobindo* (on the floor.) Suddenly she felt a great Force, made of massive Peace and Silence, coming down from above, clearing the mind, removing all contents and stopping in the region of the heart. *The Mother* remained seated for some time while *Sri Aurobindo* was talking to another person, then, silent, without disturbing, she got up and went away. He could do nothing but this: thank the Divine and *Sri Aurobindo*.

Something similar had now happened in my life. I was struck by the fact that one of the simplest techniques in the world, like *Japa*, had produced such a valuable result! Where my best intentions failed, *Japa* had produced the miracle!

In the following days the same event happened again – always during *mental Pranayama*, after my daily number of *Kriya* breaths (I never went beyond 36 repetitions.) There was a perfect association between the practice of *Japa* and the attainment of the state of breathlessness.

Compared to the results obtained through *Japa*, my past experiences of stilling the mind seemed elusive, short-lived, superficial, illusory.

This event happened every day, but only when I met the following conditions:

- [1] *Japa* had to be practiced with the voice and not mentally for at least one *Mala* (108 times).
- [2] It should not have been practiced immediately before the *Kriya* session: a couple of hours before was the ideal time.
- [3] From the moment the 108 repetitions occurred, the *Japa* had to proceed mentally, effortlessly, regardless of whether the mind was concentrated or not.
- [4] The routine had to contain all the techniques with the *higher Kriyas* preceded by the practice of *Pranayama*, a practice that was eventually resumed to achieve a total calmness.
- [5] The breathlessness occurred by letting the breath free and gently concentrating a little on the first three *Chakras* and then settling in the heart *Chakra*. I have never, I say never, managed to go beyond this *Chakra*. In it I found the ideal state, the perfection! ⁸

During the following Summer, *Japa* was practiced in the morning and *Kriya* at noon in the open countryside. When I reached the breathless state, I used to open my eyes, keeping my gaze fixed. Well, that state instantly deepened as a sense of inner freedom settled into my consciousness. The resistance of my Ego disappeared and I was seized by a real experience of the Divine.

I think that, keeping my eyes open, the awareness that my body lived with inner energy became more acute, most likely it was the contemplation of Beauty that was the decisive factor: I realized that the essence of that Beauty was the Divine itself.

The Mother had said that the contemplation of Beauty in nature and in some forms of art should not be considered a fleeting emotion, but should be experienced as an indomitable search for the divinization of life.

Enchanted, I contemplated the glittering splendor of a full manifestation of the Divine in the atoms of inert matter: there was a purity in this idea that I had never considered before, which excited and moved me. I remember moments when I felt a heat in my head and went into an almost feverish state.

⁸ Only many years later I was able to understand why I could not go beyond the fourth *Chakra*. In fact, I understood that focusing on the first three *Chakras* is the procedure for contacting the *Samana* current located in the navel area. This current helps to enter *Sushumna* and establish consciousness in the fourth *Chakra*, which makes it possible to attain the breathless state.

My overall reaction was an intense love for *The Mother*. Beauty in nature was the Divine and the Divine was *The Mother*. The more I felt love for Her, the more the Divine was in front of me. *The Mother* was now no longer in this physical dimension, she had abandoned her body for years. I could not physically meet her: every night I began to dream of her.

Often during the day, as I walked, my eyes filled with tears. These were born of my love for Her and this love brought a great blessing in my life.

A few words

Ishta Devata indicates the preferred form of conceiving the divine Essence. I explained that my instinctive way of conceiving the Divine was to contemplate the Beauty of Nature. Now my *Ishta Devata* was *The Mother*.

Often, practicing *Kriya* in the open countryside, I had the impression of being relentlessly crushed by her vibration. Winter came; in my warm room, during meditation, I tried to recover the memory of my experiences during the past summer. The landscape that I had contemplated so many times in the final moments of my *Kriya* routine was now an image frozen in a transparent purity; even now my breath was gone in less than a second. This winter season was the time to understand what had happened in my life.

It is commonly explained that the spiritual path of *Kriya* begins with the event of Initiation by a Master, a *Guru*. Well in my case the initiation was not a ceremony in which I learned a technique and then passed in front of a teacher and received his touch at the point between the eyebrows. This is something that can happen but it seems to me a symbolic fact only useful to produce a certain emotion. A much, much deeper event had happened to me.

My initiation was a happy coincidence. That is, as I cultivated a burning desire to explore the spiritual path, at the same time the presence of a great soul like *The Mother* became real in my life. I understood that she was helping me: then immediately my inner transformation began. My heart radiated love towards her. The love I gave to *The Mother* changed me forever. Through this love something that was beyond human life flowed into me.

She was no longer here on the physical plane: she had left her body. I could not physically kneel in front of her: I could only practice one technique and, through it, increase my spiritual transport. In such a situation I intuitively felt that person as my *Guru*.

When I first read about *The Mother*, I did not expect her to be my

Guru. But the reality was that she acted in my life as a Guru.

I knew that *The Mother* had never behaved like a traditional *Guru*. She was able to extract all the hidden potentials from the people who turned to her. She said that one becomes a true individual only when, in the constant search for greater beauty, harmony and knowledge, these potentials are perfectly and compactly integrated with the divine center that burns eternally in the pure heart of the seeker. I fully understood that this had happened in my life.

Finding PY's organization had been a preparation stage. Finding *The Mother* was meeting a teaching characterized by very high levels of subtlety that dragged me towards the Divine.

If I examine with clear eyes my way of practicing *Kriya Yoga* in my *Kriya* organization, I see that my attitude was improper. Unfortunately, joining that organization did not mean for me to find new means to perfect my previous practice of *Pranayama*.

Within the organization, I had subconsciously betrayed the values my culture had instilled in me. I had deviated from my personal way of thinking and feeling, embracing as truth a set of ideas extraneous to my nature. My judgment was compromised, it practically no longer existed. Obviously the responsibility was mine. In fact, I met many people in the organization who, unlike me, had nourished, while remaining faithful to it, the best traits of their personality, growing in rationality, intuition and sensitivity.

Instead of focusing on the joy of perfecting the art of *Pranayama*, I relaxed my effort, lulled into the false sense that finding *Kriya* was a stroke of luck. This idea, combined with the infantile concept that each *Kriya* breath produced "the equivalent of a solar year of spiritual evolution" and that through a million of these breaths I would infallibly reach Cosmic Consciousness, had made my *Kriya* routine become nothing but a habit lived with a lazy mind.

The first efforts in learning the *Pranayama* that at the beginning I had learned from a book were instead accompanied by a constant search for improvement. My intuition was alive, constantly stimulated; as I practiced, I anticipated a refinement that would inevitably take place and I was excited, albeit quietly, during every moment of my practice. I constantly felt like one who is pursuing his own ideal of perfection, of Beauty.

Later, having received *Kriya*, the idea of practicing "the fastest technique in the field of spiritual evolution" made me lose the intensity of my effort. I did not realize that my iron discipline was softened by the hypnotic promise of the "blessings of the Guru." "Aren't you glad you found a real Guru?" For years I have heard this refrain from my *Kriya*

organization. "Aren't you thrilled that He was chosen for you by God himself?" Oh yes I'm happy, I thought with almost hysterical excitement. This idea, more than any other factor, had lethal effects on me, it was the cradle where my ego fed and became stronger.

My fundamental mistake was to let *Kriya* (reinforced by selfish motivations) be practiced by my overactive mind. The teaching I had received from *Sri Ramdas* and *The Mother* was that I first had to create the state of **Mental Silence** by erasing all ideas, plans and distractions born of the ego. Through Mental Silence the Divine would have descended into my life, would have crossed all the layers that protect the ego: thoughts, emotions, sensations ... Only then would the intuition become my one and only guide again.

Sri Ramana Maharshi wrote:

"Hearken! It stands as an insentient hill. Its action is mysterious, past human understanding. From the age of innocence it had shone in my mind that Arunachala was something of surpassing grandeur, but even when I came to know through another that it was the same as Tiruvannamalai I did not realize its meaning. When it drew me up to it, stilling the mind, and I came close I saw IT STAND UNMOVABLE."

Well, the experience of the breathlessness of which I spoke, lived with the image of *The Mother* in my heart, was for me the "Unmovable"!

CHAPTER 4

I FOLLOW TWO NEW KRIYA TEACHERS

[I]

The idea of the existence of an *original Kriya* by *Lahiri Mahasaya*, different from the one taught by my organization, was ignited by a book I found in Vienna. It was written by an Indian *Yogi: Swami Hariharananda* who claimed to teach this *original Kriya*.

Tormented by the suspicion (suspicion then amply confirmed) that PY had taught a simplified form of *Kriya* to suit the needs of his Western disciples, I studied that book dreaming of guessing the form of *Kriya* he was teaching.

Meanwhile my daily application of *Japa* lost its bite. Less time was devoted to deepening the breathless state, while more time was devoted to experimenting with variants of the *Kriya Pranayama* technique.

Months earlier I had formulated the following thought: "I must never lose the joy of the breathless state, even for a single minute, every day of my life. This is the most real thing ever experienced"!

But the frantic search for *original Kriya* made me lose my mind. I had opened a door that couldn't be closed that easily. An intense satisfaction arose from reading and rereading the book I had just found, also underlining a few sentences.

I was struck by reading that the practice of *Pranayama* had to be considered wrong if, after an appropriate number of breaths, the practitioner did not listen to the inner sound of the *Om*, without the need to close the ears. That sentence didn't let me sleep. It "dangerously" suggested that an unimaginably deep and rich technique of spiritual realization had been stolen from me, as well as from all of us Westerners, only because PY found it difficult to teach it to his first American disciples.

MEETING WITH SWAMI HARIHARANANDA

Due to the need to undergo surgery in the United States, this *Swami* would soon be staying in Europe. I gave myself a lot to do to meet him and receive his initiation into this *Original Kriya*.

That time soon came. The introductory lecture was of great emotional impact. He had a majestic and noble appearance, he was "handsome" in his ocher robe, an elder with long hair, pure beard – he was the personification of the sage. I peeked at him hidden behind some lines of people; I felt that his speech was based on direct experience.

My soul was filled with joyful anticipation for the improvements that

I could bring to each of the *Kriya* techniques that I had practiced without interruption for many years.

At certain moments in the conference, being enormously curious to guess new technical details, I was unable to pay him due attention. My obsession was: "What kind of sounds must be produced in the throat in this *Original Kriya*; to which center does the energy rise during inhalation?"

I finally received this long-awaited initiation from him: the technique was very different from what I was used to. I merged this teaching with what I already knew well. I made countless experiments to make this fusion.

I really appreciated his fantastic "*Forward bends*" and his particular *Maha Mudra*. In *Kriya Pranayama* the most important thing was to add a continuous will to listen to the inner sounds.

According to his teaching, the breath always had to be subtle, not necessarily long. The sounds made in the throat when breathing through the nose disappeared or were very subtle. Withdrawing strength from the breath led to great mental relaxation.

This practice was accompanied by a second whose basic idea was to visualize the spine as a well. You went down and then up along this well, using a ladder whose steps were the *Chakras*. The first breath helped you to reach *Ajna* with awareness starting from the *Fontanel*, the second breath helped you to reach the fifth *Chakra* ... and so on ... reaching all the remaining *Chakras* ... ⁹ After a few full rounds you found yourself immersed in a state of bliss.

I do not think that his *Kriya* could be defined as the "*Original Kriya*." There can in fact be different ways of practicing *Kriya* and all of them have valid and effective methods to get to bring the consciousness inside the spine. However the decision to apply the principle of listening to the sound of *Om*, without the need to close the ears, during *Kriya Pranayama* helped me to deepen my meditation in a fantastic way.

The stupendous and fascinating words of this master were an important revelation for me. What is certain is that the concepts that I had absorbed during the conference and then during the initiation had ignited in me a new way of conceiving *Kriya Yoga*.

He had insisted a lot on the concept that *Kriya* was used to enter the *Omkar reality*, specifying that this had to be perceived not only in the aspect of sound and light but also as a "sensation of oscillation, movement or inner pressure."

In order for the students to understand these three aspects, he touched (head and chest) some students who were in the front row

⁹ Much later I realized that *Swami Hariharananda's* teaching had been influenced by the *Radhasoami* movement. I hint to this movement in chapter 12 while *Swami Hariharananda's* teachings are explained in detail in chapter 14.

vibrating his hand, trying to transmit like a tremor to their body. He was introducing us to a wonderful dimension, giving himself completely to us, so that we could intuit the essence of the *Omkar* experience.

The conception that he had passed on to us created an understanding of the whole *Kriya* practice as a single progressive process of being in tune with the *Omkar* reality. Like a thread in which pearls are strung, the *Omkar* perception had to go through all the different phases of *Kriya*.

Attending my first *Kriya* school I thought that the *Omkar* reality only concerned the technique (preliminary to *Kriya*) of listening to the inner sounds by closing the ears. Now I realized that the *Omkar* reality possessed several aspects and involved every practice of *Kriya Yoga*. This was one of the most important discoveries along my spiritual path.

EFFECTS

Remembering the period in which I had practiced the "*Om* technique" (received from my school) I knew well that every effort towards listening to the internal sounds was very well rewarded. The increase in devotion to the Divine, the blissful rapture into a spiritual passion arising from my heart, experienced at that time has never been surpassed by other events. The idea of rediscovering and then reliving that period through the practice of a much richer form of *Kriya Pranayama* fascinated me.

Trying to realize this ideal, the old well-known sweetness entered my life again and I welcomed it with much gratitude and with an open heart. Daily contact with the *Om* vibration was my heaven on earth for many weeks. I can't imagine anything that can make a person feel so blissful.

I had the clear perception that a state of inconceivable sweetness was now mine, that I could enjoy it every day, not only during meditation but also when, free from work or various commitments, I relaxed. Maintaining this experience became the only goal of my *Kriya* practices.

In the winter of that year I had an unforgettable experience. I had a three-week vacation. I spent every morning wrapped in the warmth of my home, practicing as much as possible and applying the fundamental concepts that *Swamiji* had insisted so much on. I also spent a few days in a beautiful winter sports resort, where I was free to walk in the snow-white countryside without a fixed destination. As I idly walked aimlessly, the sunset came early and marvelous colors tinged the landscape; the small village sunk in the snow reflected in those few seconds of glory all the possible colors of the spectrum. That will forever remain the splendid symbol of this wonderful period of my life.

After a year I received from *Swami Hariharananda* his particular form of *Second Kriya*. I was ecstatic: the explanations were given live and not

through written material. I was so happy!

The purpose of the *Second Kriya* was to have a profound experience of the six *Chakras* and then to transcend their reality. The *Prana* was intensified and distributed equally among all the *Chakras*. After many repetitions of the whole procedure (which also involved particular movements of the head), one felt that one's awareness was separated from the physical body – like a cloud floating in a sky of peace. It was explained that the *Second Kriya* was able to "break the coconut." The "coconut" was the symbol of the human head whose upper part was filled with calm *Prana*.

After initiation into *Second Kriya*, while I was walking around the city where *Swamiji* was staying, everything seemed more beautiful than ever. It was a sunny day and the bells rang in the splendor of noon. I lived like in a paradise.

This was a moment in my life when I experienced total fulfillment as if the *Kriya* path had come to an end. After returning home, I practiced intensively. One day, at my place of work, I was in a room from which, through a glass door, I could see the mountains from afar and contemplate a layer of snow on their top and, above this, a sky of a pure celestial. I was ecstatic! That distant sky symbolized my future years, totally dedicated to *Kriya Yoga*. For the first time, the idea of living in this state for the rest of my days took hold of me.

DISAPPOINTMENT

Unfortunately the following year I received a great disappointment. I asked *Swamiji* for a private interview. A few days later I was in his room. My aim was to obtain information on that part of the *Second Kriya* that I knew existed but about which nothing was told to me during the initiation. In this part all the syllables of the Sanskrit alphabet were used.¹⁰ He said I shouldn't practice any of this. Instead he took the strong initiative to guide me in the practice of "*Forward Bends*." This was a real blessing! He gave all of himself in repeating all the main concepts of his teaching as if he wanted to impress them even more in my mind.

Speaking of *Kriya*, he said that the original spirit of this had been lost in this age. He told me he wanted me to feel and live in this spirit. To have this it was essential to practice only what I had received, nothing more. Looking at a shelf in his room, he pointed to a bulky document folder and asked me to bring it to him. He opened it and showed me many drawings representing various phases of *Kriya*. He smiled as he leafed through them. I had the impression that he wanted to show me that he knew everything about *Kriya* but that he guaranteed me that what I had

¹⁰ I got this information some years later. You can read every detail in chapter 14.

learned was sufficient for my life, now and in the future.

He saw my curiosity but made me realize that my quest to learn about other techniques meant little commitment to essential techniques. And with this statement he ended the meeting. That same evening I meditated at his feet along with other devotees.

I felt inspired by being there but *Swamiji's* decision instead of making me more serious in the decision to practice the *First* and *Second Kriya* seriously created anguish: how and where could I learn the *Higher Kriyas* from this school?

His decision was known to every person who had known him for a long time. Everyone knew that only the few chosen disciples who followed him on his travels could receive higher teachings. Awareness of this situation froze the enthusiasm of many and contributed to his isolation.

This *Swami* did not seem to take into consideration the insatiable curiosity of the majority of *kriyabans* who did not accept any interference in their search. His unfortunate decision triggered an automatic reflex that alienated the people most indispensable to him. Unfortunately these people, consumed by the thirst for complete teachings, began to look for other teachers.

Disappointed by their defection, he remained even more firm in his decision. Those who tried to make him understand the absurdity of the situation and then remedy it, found themselves in front of a wall.

The soil he plowed and was cultivating began to become barren. He had all the means necessary to attract the Western world. The book he had written had constituted a perfect strategic action that had made him very popular, creating for him a place of crucial importance in the field of *Kriya*. In addition there was also his Indian sage figure who impressed people. There were hundreds of researchers who were enthusiastic about him, who were ready to support his mission, who would always treat him as a "god" and would behave equally respectfully with any of his collaborators or successors.

It is true that some people were happy with his *Kriya*, but they were not very motivated individuals who would have tended to never go out of their way to organize seminars for him. To put it bluntly, the loyalty of various students was not enough to avoid the worst outcome. His admirable effort, all the wonderful subtleties with which he had enriched our *Kriya*, making this practice much more beautiful, was not enough to prevent him from encountering the shipwreck of his mission – at least here in Europe.¹¹

Using the same leaflets, just changing photos and names, many of those people who had been busy organizing his seminars invited another teacher

¹¹ Something remains indeed, but very scanty compared to what he could have realized if only he had been more conciliatory!

from India because they knew that he was in favor of explaining *Kriya* in its complete form. It must be said that those who had already met this new teacher in India realized that his spiritual realization was almost non-existent. This invitation was perhaps made more out of desperation than out of conviction.

A beautiful event

Remember the episode when I was looking for clarification on the *Higher Kriyas* received through the correspondence course – the Minister refused to give me any clarification. Instead, he recommended that I mail my questions to my organization's headquarters. Nine years had passed.

I felt quite distant from this organization but nevertheless I respected it and when two women ministers visited my country, I took part in a *Kriya* review class. During a break between classes, what I had once hoped for and which was denied me so brutally, happened naturally and with absolute ease. I had a private interview with one of the two ministers and all my doubts were cleared up.

I was lucky enough to meet a kind person who spoke from direct experience. As for *Kechari Mudra* I was told that it occurs over time, especially by **insisting on touching the uvula with the tip of the tongue**. I could also clarify PY's sentence according to which: "The *Chakras* can be awakened by psycho-physical blows directed towards their locations." I was reassured of its meaning: the phrase referred to the use of the *Mantra* associated with the breath. So he was not referring to another hypothetical technique, other than what was comprehensively described in the written material. She explained that if a syllable is mentally chanted with intensity in the seat of a *Chakra*, it creates a "psycho-physical blow".

This clarification inspired my practice. Back home, I felt like I was reliving the best time of my life. I discovered unthinkable ways of perfecting the final part of my *Kriya* routine: by projecting the mental chanting of the *Mantra* into each *Chakra*, I realized the power to touch the core of each one with an almost physical intensity. A great sweetness arose from this procedure; the body seemed to stiffen like a statue and the breathless state made the mind transparent like a crystal. I would have liked to abandon my search for *Original Kriya* and consider my current *Kriya* routine as definitive. My routine was a wonderful amalgamation of what I had been taught by my organization and *Swami Hariharananda*, but by then the eagerness to find information about *Kriya* had already wreaked havoc and poured a deadly poison into my soul.

How my search for the complete form of Swami Hariharananda's Kriya continued several years later.

A couple of years after the first publication of this book, I was contacted by a French researcher. He introduced himself as a former disciple of a disciple of *Swami Hariharananda* and thanked me for posting *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya* online. We talked about what he was interested in and then the talk turned to *Swami Hariharananda's Kriya*. He was happy to complete my knowledge of the *Second Kriya* and he also explained the *Third Kriya*, hinting at the introduction of the *Fourth Kriya*.

Years later an American researcher shared with me a document that made me fully understand the *Fourth Kriya*. With the help of these researchers it was possible for me to prepare the recent edition of chapter 14 and appendix 6 which, together, contain *Swami Hariharananda's Kriya* in its entirety.

[III]

MY SECOND AND LAST TEACHER

It took two years for this new teacher who had been invited to Europe to overcome the visa problems, but when he arrived he found practically all of *Swami Hariharananda's* disciples ready to welcome him as a messenger sent from God.

And this teacher in fact gave us the long-awaited key to obtain *Kechari Mudra*, taught *Navi Kriya* and gave us other precious teachings such as the *Higher Kriyas*.¹²

When the time came to meet him, I was not in the best mood. From some clues, I knew I was about to come to terms with a radically new approach. I was afraid this might upset the beautiful routine in which I had settled. The magical dimension of *Omkar*, in which *Swami Hariharananda* had immersed me in such a passionate way, could not be cast aside or forgotten. I approached the new teacher, determined to reject him if he somehow seemed to take me away from this reality. I agreed to meet him for one reason only: to have what *Swami Hariharananda* had decided not to give me.

¹² I will talk about *Kechari Mudra* and *Navi Kriya* in chapter 7 and the other teachings in chapter 9.

I met this new teacher in a *Yoga* center. The synthesis of his introductory speech was that *Kriya* did not mean to inflate the mind and Ego but it was to undertake a journey beyond the mind. In time, I realized that *Sri Krishnamurti's* thought was the source on which this teacher based his way of thinking.

I observed in him indulgently some defects of behavior that instead negatively impressed other people. For example, he was short-tempered. When it came to teaching simple and mundane things that even kindergarten children understood, there was a great profusion of words and concepts were repeated ad nauseam. When in the audience there was someone who gently but firmly asked for a precise explanation on some practical difficulty, he seemed to come out of a hypnotic state and, visibly vexed, threw up insults on him to humiliate him and shut his mouth. He often had outbursts of anger when he believed he perceived, underneath legitimate questions, a veiled form of opposition, a hidden intention to challenge his authority.

I concentrated all my attention on learning his form of *Kriya* and I did not care about his obvious shortcomings. I believed that the reason for his trip to the West was to restore the original teachings: this was enough to overcome my initial discomfort.

In the following initiation seminar, the explanation of the techniques was reasonably clear even if, in some parts, it was unusually synthetic. For example, the instructions on *Kriya Pranayama* – formally correct – could only be understood by those who had already practiced *Kriya Yoga* for a long time. However, I realized that my search for the original *Kriya* was continuing. I followed this teacher for several years. Below I explain why I later broke off all relations with him.

KECHARI MUDRA

Returning home after the initiation seminar, in the time of three months I reached *Kechari Mudra*.¹³ For a couple of weeks the effects of the *Kechari* were a sense of "grogginess." My mental faculties seemed clouded but when it all ceased, I learned to live in a constant state of serenity.

Some days I was so happy that when I went out for a walk, if I met someone and stopped to listen to them, no matter what they said, a sudden joy burst in my chest, it rose up to my eyes, so much so that it was difficult to hold back the tears. Looking at distant mountains or other parts of the landscape, I tried to direct what I felt towards them, in order to transform the paralyzing joy into an aesthetic rapture; this was holding back the joy that locked my being and hid it. Inspired by this new condition, comparing

¹³ I believe it is legitimate to ask why do *Kriya* organizations not teach such a simple technique as *Talabya Kriya* that helps us to reach *Kechari Mudra*.

it with that of the mystics, I realized how difficult it was to live, carry on daily and worldly duties, without being paralyzed by an ever-present feeling of intoxication!

A regrettable feature of this teacher was the haste and superficiality with which he explained the *Kriya* techniques. The introductory lecture to *Kriya* (which was usually held the day before initiation) and much of the time of the initiation seminar was devoted to a pure philosophical discourse which did not concern the basics of *Kriya Yoga* but was a summary of the fundamental points of the *Krishnamurti*'s thought – mainly the theme of no-mind, which he improperly called *Swadhyaya*. There was not a single word that could be criticized, everything he was saying was correct, but many students, sitting uncomfortably on the floor, with their backs and knees starting to ache, only waited for the explanation of the techniques, enduring a hardly that colossal hassle.

Traditional offerings (he also requested a coconut, which in our places was very difficult to find, forcing the students to search desperately from shop to shop) lay in a messy pile in front of a scruffy altar. Since he arrived very late compared to the agreed time, those who came from other cities saw all their plans for the return journey go to pieces and were very agitated. When someone had already left the room, just in time to catch the last train, despite the fact that it was late and the people were tired, he still loved to linger on Patanjali's *Yama* and *Niyama*, taking his time to ask bystanders to take a solemn vow: that from then on male students look upon women (except their own wives) as mothers and, likewise, women should look upon males (except their husbands) as fathers. The audience listened to his ravings with a sigh of ill-concealed annoyance.¹⁴

Only then did he move on to a hasty explanation of the basic techniques. On one occasion I timed him and saw that he had not spent more than two minutes explaining the fundamental technique of *Kriya Pranayama*! He demonstrated this procedure by making an exaggeratedly loud, vibrato

¹⁴ I respect of course *Yama-Niyama* (the what-is-correct and the what-is-not-correct) but, in my opinion, requiring people who are anxious for learning *Kriya Yoga* techniques to take an oath to obey them is only a farce and a waste of time. My teacher's request in particular was impossible, an oath that no one would ever respect. Why not put confidence in the transforming power of *Kriya*? Why think that without oaths, a *kriyaban*'s life would be licentious? The necessity of adopting specific ways of behavior is something that appears spontaneously after having tasted the honey of the spiritual experience. Perhaps in the beginning the best thing is not to cry shame because of a problematic student's behavior. To put it simply, it has been seen that people living a morally questionable life were successful in *Kriya* and spontaneously came to the so-called virtuous life, while a lot of conformists failed.

sound. He knew that this sound was not correct but he continued to use it in order to be heard even by the people sitting in the back rows, saving himself the trouble of moving near them, as *Kriya* teachers usually do. Unfortunately, he did not take the trouble to clarify that the sound had to be clean and not vibrated. I know that many people, thinking it was the "secret" he brought us from India, were trying to make the same noise. He continued like this for years, despite the kind complaints of his close collaborators. Given his character, even when I worked with him I never dreamed of protesting.

Reasons that led me to abandon this teacher

One day I received a visit from the couple of students initiated into *Kriya Yoga* by *Swami Hariharananda* who organized the tours of this new teacher in Germany. As they spoke, they emphasized the need to make a proposal to our teacher. It was about adding a guided group practice to his *Kriya* initiation seminars. It would serve as a refresher for both new initiates and those who were already practicing. I took care of getting this request to the teacher through a friend who was going to India. I gave him a letter to deliver to him in person, with my regards and a warm hug.

The master's reaction was inexplicable. He took my letter as a form of criticism of his methods. In response, he removed me from the list of those who organized his seminars in Europe. His decision was forwarded to the Italian coordinator who did not deign to inform me. A few months passed.

My adventure with this teacher would probably have ended there if I hadn't gone to welcome him on his arrival in Europe. We hugged as if nothing had happened. He probably interpreted my presence as a move to repent. A few hours later, while the master was resting, his collaborator, with a slight, indecipherable hint of embarrassment, explained to me what had happened behind the scenes, that is, of the fact that he no longer considered me his disciple. I was dismayed and disoriented. The first impulse was to give up everything and close any relationship with this teacher.

In order not to disturb the peace of all the people who were my friends and had followed me in this adventure, I decided to pretend that nothing had happened, to continue to collaborate with him and to let go of the topic covered in the letter I had forwarded to him. If I had gone I would have disturbed the initiation into the *Higher Kriya* procedures based on the *Tribhangamurari* movement. This initiation was scheduled for the following day.

That was a beautiful moment in which *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya* revealed (to those who had the sensitivity to perceive it) all its hidden beauty. My

role was to be a translator. I knew how to carry out this function well, reporting every little detail while whoever replaced me in this task was based on what they had already heard in the past and, as usual, would have neglected to translate 80% of the speech.

It happened, however, that during the initiation he showed the movements of the head in *Thokar* (*Higher Kriya*) in a significantly different way from those of the previous year. When one of those present asked for clarification on the change, he claimed not to have changed anything, adding that certainly in the previous year there had been a translation problem. His lie was obvious. That *kriyaban* remembered well the head movements he had seen earlier. I knew, but could not tell, that the previous year he had shown some movements that did not correspond to the correct ones.

Considering other changes, I had the impression of being the collaborator of an archaeologist who intentionally alters some finds to present them to the public within his usual theoretical frame of reference.

Months later, on another tour, when we were alone and he was looking for something in a room, I found the courage to mention that, in fact, he had changed the movements of the *Thokar*.

He suddenly turned to me with hate in his eyes, yelling at me that my practice was none of his business. This, according to what I remember, was the only technical "discourse" I had with him during the years I followed him.

From that moment on, everything changed. Deliberately I began to control myself and made up my mind to always agree with him. I acted so well that one day he asked me to teach *Kriya* to those people who showed interest and who could not meet him during his tours. I was happy with this opportunity because I dreamed of finally being able to explain *Kriya* in a complete and exhaustive form. I wanted none of my students to ever feel the pain of seeing a legitimate question go unanswered.

About a year passed when I realized I was doing useless work. I granted *Kriya* initiation respecting the fixed protocol that the master had told me to follow. When I took leave of those students I knew that most of them would practice for a maximum of ten days and then abandon everything to pursue other esoteric interests. Usually, one or two of the most persistent students would have come up with questions and phoned me if only to have the illusion of carrying on a relationship with a real person from a distance.

When the teacher came to our country I invited all the new initiates to the seminars where this teacher would be present. Unfortunately, many did not

"survive" this encounter. Accustomed by me to asking any question and always receiving precise answers, they tried to do the same with the teacher. Good heavens! He mocked most of the questions, suggesting that they were a sign of a sick way of thinking. He often let himself get angry. Observing my teacher for a total lack of human understanding as they were being mistreated, many entered into a profound crisis.

A lot of things weren't going well at all. I felt that this man, whom I tried to satisfy every little whim as if I were performing a sacred act, did not love *Kriya*. Instead, he only used it to lead a much more beautiful life here in the West than his wretched life in India as he had often described to me.

Another year passed. In response to the request of some friends abroad, I went to their group to teach *Kriya Yoga*. In that group I met a very serious student who knew my teacher's ways well and who attended the initiation seminar only as an opportunity to review. He asked me some very pertinent questions and always found precise answers. The problem was just that: "Who did you learn all these details from?" he asked me. He knew very well that my teacher was a total disaster from a didactic point of view. He felt that I had learned many details from other sources. How could I then initiate *Kriya* using knowledge that did not come from my teacher?

He could understand my embarrassment and was perplexed that, precisely because he had authorized me to teach *Kriya*, I had never had the opportunity to speak openly to him about technical details! It was my duty to resolve the matter as soon as possible.

Knowing my teacher's short temper, I hesitated a lot, but there was no alternative. Through a friend I sent him a fax mentioning the problem in question and begging him to arrange his time so that we could discuss it after he arrived in my group on his next tour. He was in Australia but I would have the answer within a week at the latest. My unconscious was ready for cataclysm, anticipating an event that I intuitively knew would happen. The most likely situation was that he would get very angry and freak out. If the whole situation got out of hand and, as a result of our breakup, he no longer joined our group, those who loved him would suffer. Few could have understood the reasons for my action. I would have been the one who disturbed an imperfect but still comfortable situation. In fact, my friends liked him; the fact that he visited our group every year was very stimulating and in fact they prepared for those occasions with an intense practice of *Kriya*.

A somewhat stern response came a few days later. In a contemptuous tone, he did not address me directly but pretended to answer the person who had actually sent him the fax. He wrote that my excessive attachment to

techniques would never allow me to step outside the enclosures of my mind – I was like St. Thomas, too eager to touch and verify the goodness of his teachings. He added that he would fulfill my request but only to gratify my ego.

Reading the term "gratification" I saw that he did not understand anything. We should have talked to each other a long time ago! I wondered why he had never let me talk about these problems. I didn't want to contest it, I didn't want to destroy it; I had written to him only to establish once and for all what I should say and what not to say to the *kriyabans* during initiation. Why had it always escaped me?

I decided to act as plainly as if I hadn't caught his tone. I just wanted to see what he would do. I didn't apologize, nor did I respond resentfully. I wrote that I was teaching *Kriya* on his own and that therefore a discussion on certain details of *Kriya* was necessary. I added that the other three persons in Europe similarly authorized by him to give initiation into *Kriya Yoga* could also take part in this event. So I made him understand that he would not waste his time and breath just for me. I had no answer, neither then nor ever again. Weeks later they pointed out to me that on his website, the plan for his visit to Italy had been changed and the name of my village no longer appeared. My second letter had made the definitive break. The nightmare was over!

I took a day off and went for a long walk; I walked a lot, nervously, imagining a hypothetical conversation with him. At one point I found myself crying with joy. It was too good – I was free. I had been with this guy for too many years, and now it was truly over!

The question I would ask myself for years was why I had followed him for so long. Certainly I had not sacrificed my dignity just to receive information on *Kriya*! In fact, all of his techniques had been anticipated to me by a friend who was a disciple of one of his father's disciples. The reason for my conflicting behavior was my keen interest in the spread of *Kriya* here in Europe. I appreciated the fact that he traveled extensively across the USA and here in Europe to spread his *Kriya* without asking a penny for his initiations (except a free offer and a fair share of the costs of renting the seminar room.) For my part, the will to cooperate with him was always constant. I met all the expenses necessary to permanently set up a room in my house, where *Kriya* initiation seminars could be held during his visits.

When I saw that he continued to teach in his hasty and superficial way, taking advantage of us as if we were totally jerks, my unconscious began to rebel. A dream in which I was swimming in manure is still alive in my memory. I must admit that behind my mask of fake delight, there was an

agony of aridity. There were times when, thinking of my simple beginnings with *Yoga*, my heart distilled an indefinite nostalgia for such a period that was waiting for nothing but coherence and integrity on my part to rise again and blossom without hindrance. When I received his rude and completely out of place response to my legitimate request, I realized that my inner truth was now at stake and I said to myself – Now or never!

I could not then tolerate the slightest distortion of the truth. I removed all diplomatic masks and caused a break with this third teacher.

This created bewilderment among my *kriyaban* friends who had spontaneously grown fond of him. Over time they understood my reasons and were in solidarity with me.

With a "domino" effect, other coordinators in Europe, who did not tolerate his ways, took the opportunity to cut ties with him. They were fed up with the heaviness of his philosophical discourses followed by poor technical explanations, which did not satisfy their desire for a good understanding of *Kriya*.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER OUR SEPARATION

The following months were lived in a state of peace and relaxation, nothing to compare with the restless years I have previously described. Having dismissed that mean individual, a nerve-wracking situation had found an end. I no longer had to go here and there to organize *Kriya* seminars for him; I was relieved of the need to put on a mask of hypocrisy and to respond with mock enthusiasm to those who called me to ask about him.

I did not have the faintest idea of what the fate of the newly formed *Kriya* groups – which he had visited regularly until then – would be. There was every reason to celebrate this release but the weight of all the wasted time, all the silly things that had been done without thinking, weighed on me.

Another reality that I must sadly take note of was that the magical period in which I had only deeply experienced *Swami Hariharananda's Kriya* had slowly dissolved. My tenacity in learning this *Original Kriya* had given me other realizations but made me forget the magic of that period. That magic, as I explained, was based on accompanying each breath of *Kriya Pranayama* with the constant intent of listening to the inner sounds including the sound of *Om*. It took a long time to fully recover that all-important detail.

If I ask myself which are the teachings that I keep with me after the experience with this second teacher, I realize that his contribution was to guide me into a new realm for me that of *Tribhangamurari*, to be explored

with great patience, a work that I am still carrying on now.

Another merit was that of having introduced and guided me with great care to *Krishnamurti's* thought.

J. Krishnamurti

As I have written, it was my last *Kriya* teacher who advised me to start studying *Krishnamurti*. The strange fact is that thanks to this study I found the crucial and conclusive push that would help me, after many years of controversial but loyal discipleship, to break my addiction to him.

Krishnamurti said what it was difficult to fully agree with at the time: "What need is there to have a *Guru*? [...] You must walk alone, you must begin the journey alone, and during that journey you must be both your own teacher and student." As I read those words I felt no doubt that they expressed a profound truth but my logic suggested firmly: "This is a sophism; even *Krishnamurti* himself had acted as a *Guru*." I could not make this wise admonition real; fear and conditioning held me back. How many mistakes I still had to make, how many slaps I still had to take before I could assert my freedom from the *Gurus*!

I studied many books by this author but none have the beauty of *The Only Revolution*. It is not easy to immediately understand its meaning. You only need to read one chapter at a time and read it again in the following days.

Only repeated exposure to sunlight can produce a tan; similarly it is necessary to expose our mind many times to its teaching before realizing its meaning. Take this little book with you on walks until you understand why this teaching is so important in your lives!

The Only Revolution is a perfect synthesis of poetry and wisdom. "Life begins where thought ends" writes *Krishnamurti*. Do you want to make this teaching your own? Take your time. The practice of *Kriya* will inexplicably become deeper.

Other events

- A friend stayed for a few days at an *Ashram* in India where he knew that *Kriya Yoga* could be received. The monk who led this *Ashram* (*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*) was not present, but the friend received *Kriya* initiation from one of his disciples. He bought a large volume where there was a concise description of the techniques. On my return from India, my friend, visibly satisfied, showed me this book. The techniques weren't very different from the ones I knew, but there were many more details.

There was nothing, however, to clarify my doubts, not a hint of how to get *Kechari Mudra*, nothing about *Thokar*. Instead, I remember a very complicated technique based on the visualization of the *Chakras* as they

are described in the Tantric texts. Each technique was preceded by a theoretical introduction with quotations from ancient books and accompanied by an illustration that eliminated any possible doubt. At the end of the book a very precise gradual routine was given. There was of course the claim that all these techniques constituted *Kriya* as explained by *Babaji*, the mythical *Guru* of *Lahiri Mahasaya*.

The material was very interesting, I would have liked to delude myself that my research was finally over and that those notes contained what I was looking for! It was enough to believe that *Babaji*, in order to create *Kriya Yoga*, had done nothing but make a synthesis of the numerous spiritual practices of *Tantrism*. It also took the audacity to think that *Thokar* could be considered nothing more than a banal variant of *Jalandhara Bandha*! And if there were no instructions for *Kechari Mudra*, patience, that meant.... that such *Mudra* was not important! With a little good will and application I would have been able to square the circle!

It so happened that I listened to a recording of a lecture by the author *Swami S. S.* .. He told of having found such techniques in some *tantric* texts and having made a careful selection of them to form a coherent system of *Kriya*. How then could the claim that these teachings came from *Babaji* be explained?

Simple – like many other Indian teachers, it was his disciples, not him, who compiled that material; they had the good idea of making it more interesting by hinting at the derivation from the mythical *Babaji*. The teacher, always reflecting a typical Indian custom, had never checked those notes and was, in fact, bewildered when he learned of that addition. However, he defended the work of his disciples by stating that, after all ... "*Babaji's Kriya* had *Tantric* origins."

- Some of our friends, returning from India, showed the emotion of having known an extraordinary land. But, at the end of their stories, the disappointment emerged for everything they had not been able to learn. It often happened that someone had met a boaster who had assured them that he knew the original *Kriya Yoga* and that he could give them initiation as long as they kept the most total secrecy about the fact, without establishing any contact with other seekers. In this way the boaster felt sure that for a long time his initiates would not realize that in reality what they received had nothing to do with *Kriya*.

I only became aware of this when I managed to overcome their hesitation, and persuaded them to confidentially give me a brief description of that technique. It was nothing more than the simple repetition of a *Mantra*!

The thing I most regretted was not so much the substantial offer these friends had made to those arrogant talkers (the *Gurudakshina*

[donation] they received was for them a nice booty at the expense of my friends) but the fact that so, while traveling in various parts of India they had deprived themselves of the possibility of learning *Kriya* from other sources, in other places.

- An event of a different nature happened to a friend who met *Sri Banamali Lahiri*, a direct grandson of the great *Lahiri Mahasaya*, a man of great academic education and also of direct experience of *Kriya*. Various spiritual seekers that I later met, consider him as a saint wearing the habit of humility.

My friend was not able to learn anything from this teacher, on the contrary he came back to me very confused. Speaking briefly about his experience, he made me understand how we, eager to learn something new, are unable to listen to the words of a wise man.

He told me that in Varanasi, and probably everywhere in India, *Kriya* was no longer practiced. I kept enough control not to interrupt or challenge him. Then by asking him some seemingly marginal questions, I tried to understand what had happened. My friend, as he used to do, opened the conversation by introducing futile topics and then, towards the end of the interview – almost suddenly remembering that he was in *Lahiri Mahasaya's* house – he asked if by chance any of *Lahiri Mahasaya's* descendants still practiced *Kriya*. His attitude must have frozen the illustrious listener because the answer, which hid a bitter sarcasm, was negative; in other words: "Of course not, no one here practices it anymore. In India it is no longer practiced. You are the only one left to practice it!"

At the end of his story, the friend looked at me with amazed eyes. I still don't know if he was hoping to convince me or if, more than anything else, he was immersed in his bitterness and frustration. I didn't say anything. I think he didn't realize how stupid he had been with that noble person. One month later he learned that an old acquaintance of his had received *Kriya* initiation from that very same person. He was very upset, offended by the news and made a plan to return to India and protest against that noble and austere personage. Unfortunately he never returned, because a serious illness briefly led to his death. Despite the abysmal diversity of our character, I will always be grateful to him for everything he wanted to share with me on the *Yoga* path.

- In those days I learned that there was the possibility of inviting a new *Kriya Yoga* master to Europe. Since he was a respected person, I was quite inclined to collaborate with this project by pledging to bear part of the expenses for his travel. A close friend went to India to meet him and speak to him personally. After about a month, back in Italy, he phoned me. A few hours later, we were sitting in my room. He had had a private interview

with the new teacher and had good news. I was all ears. They had talked about the deplorable situation of the spread of *Kriya* here in the West; the teacher was saddened and said he was willing to help us. At the end of that meeting, the friend had his *Kriya Pranayama* checked by that expert himself.

To my surprise this friend asked me to practice *Kriya Pranayama* in front of him. I did: he claimed that he found there was a fault in my practice. I asked him what it was and his answer froze me: he said he could not say it because he had solemnly promised the teacher not to reveal anything.¹⁵ He specified that, in reference to our group, he had asked the teacher for permission to correct eventual mistakes in our practice but the answer had been negative, indeed the teacher had demanded a real oath not to reveal anything.

So I have to think that that teacher – who had expressed his intention to help us – was afraid that, once the error was clarified, we would no longer invite him to us? Was he really that mean? I certainly did not expect my friend to tell me in detail all the things he and the teacher had said to each other. I could not and did not want to enter the intimacy of that experience, but how could he let us carry on the practice that he considered incorrect?

The fact that upset me was to see a friend with whom I had shared everything on the spiritual path, who had accompanied me in all the vicissitudes related to my previous teachers and suffered on his skin for the same reasons, almost satisfied in having found my mistake. It was as if that justified his trip to India, the money and time he had spent there. I didn't fight, but I reacted very badly. I got up and went away leaving my friend alone.

A few days later, contacted by that master's secretary, I was disgusted by how she handled the financial aspect of the trip. I declined the offer. Actually, I didn't feel like embarking on a huge organizational job all over again. As for going to him, I didn't even think about it. I was sure that the first thing he would ask of me would be the classic oath not to reveal anything to my friends. Back to them, what was I supposed to say? Maybe: "Dear friends, I can't tell you anything, you too have to go to India." We had arrived at an absurd situation: if I wanted my friends to get some crumbs of information about *Kriya*, I would have to put them on a charter flight. and send them to India. Otherwise they would have had to live without this information.

¹⁵ Considering the episode later, I realized what this incorrect detail was: I had not made an abdominal breath in a particularly visible way. I am sure of this fact because it was the only thing my friend was able to see – we did not talk about inner details of the practice.

If that had been the case, each year, an innumerable series of charter flights would have had to transport those interested in Kriya – no matter if old or sick – to a distant Indian city, such as a pilgrimage to Lourdes or Fatima! This farce was not even worthy of consideration. I felt a sense of anger and despair.

SELF-TAUGHT

Slowly the awareness emerged in me that a long period of my life was over. I had started my self-taught spiritual path and now I was inexorably back to go ahead in the same way. Of course, by attending teachers, I had obtained a lot of information but now I had to make it a part of my being and I had to decide how to do it myself.

Personally, I no longer had any personal guidance other than my experience, my ability to observe the effect of the techniques learned and my ability to design serious experimentation processes. I have often heard the acid-filled statement: "Those who do not have a *Guru* have their Ego as their *Guru*!" Sure, that may be true. Yet I am firmly convinced that the human mind, even within its limits, can help us to conceive a good *Kriya* routine, to verify, without the advice of others, if this works!

A famous spiritual chant by *Sri Yukteswar* says: "*Pranayama* be thy religion" – well, this, from now on, was to be my way of existing on the spiritual path. I had to trust only in myself and in the unrivaled power of *Pranayama*.

I thought about when, after learning *Pranayama* from a book, I had wonderful experiences and there was no one to control me! This created the foundation for self-confidence. After many years of *Kriya* I discovered, always on my own, the value of the *Mantra* and, through the practice of *Japa* – combined with the *Kriya* routine – I obtained the state of breathlessness. It is true that I received some *Mantras* from a *Kriya Acharya* but they had no effect on me. A profound experience of hearing the sound of *Om* during *Pranayama* came simply after reading a sentence from *Swami Hariharananda's* book and working intensely for a few days.

I met some "authorized" *Kriya* teachers but they did nothing but hastily repeat what I already knew. After a question or two, they got annoyed. As I wrote, the organizations disappointed me. I felt that I was in a sect, a religion, a new form of *New Age* Christianity. But now the traps I had passed through as part of an organization had become a distant memory.

How I perfected, several years later, the understanding of the complete form of Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya

The one who was my second teacher of *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya* had left me some doubts concerning the *Higher Kriyas*. They were clarified to me years after the publication of this book. I briefly explain that while for the techniques of *First Kriya* there is an almost unanimous agreement among all the teachers, as regards the *Higher Kriyas* there are mainly two different ways of conceiving the techniques. There is the common one that makes extensive use of breath holding and the one that totally ignores this detail. While the first branch was mainly spread by *Panchanan Bhattacharya*, the second was spread by *Satya Charan Lahiri*.

It was this latter teaching that I received from my second teacher. Unfortunately, I was aware that my teacher had been somewhat superficial in his explanations. I have already talked about the changes he made in the *Thokar* movement. These originated from his misunderstanding of the *Tribhangamurari* movement. Well, the correct movement was clarified to me shortly after the publication of this book by a direct disciple of *Satya Charan Lahiri* who lived in Germany and had contacted this great teacher in 1978 in Varanasi. The correct teaching is now found in my chapter 9. I will tell about how I got the information regarding the other way of introducing *the Higher Kriyas* in chapter 8.

CHAPTER 5

DECISION TO WRITE A BOOK

One winter day I went skiing in the nearby mountains with a couple of friends. Everything went beautifully. During a break in the afternoon, I managed to find time alone. I stopped to look at the distant mountains that marked the horizon in all directions. In less than half an hour the sun would have painted them pink – more those in the east, a pink that faded into blue those in the west. I imagined that India was back there, that the Himalayas were the extension of those mountains. My thoughts went to all *Kriya* enthusiasts who, like me, found insuperable obstacles in understanding their beloved discipline.

I want to clarify that by now I refer only to the *original Kriya Yoga* as taught by *Lahiri Mahasaya* and not to the slightly simplified one of my first PY *Kriya* organization where I had taken my first steps.

The various obstacles to understanding are those mentioned in the previous chapter. They seemed like an absurdity in the guise of a nightmare – I felt an endless rebellion.

I visualized a book on *Kriya* where each technique was explained in detail. So many times I had wondered what would happen if *Lahiri Mahasaya* or one of his disciples wrote it! I did not dare to think that *Lahiri Mahasaya* had made a mistake in not writing his techniques, yet I felt inside that this decision had brought suffering to people and an infinite waste of time and energy.

But let's go back to the dream of a book. My imagination even led me to get an idea of the color of the cover. I imagined leafing through its meager pages – sober, but rich in content. If this book had existed, we would have had a reliable *Kriya* manual that would have limited the many small or large variations made up by different teachers. Perhaps some commentators would have tried to "force" its meaning to fit their theories. Indeed, I am sure that some pseudo-*gurus* would have suggested that the techniques included were intended for beginners, that there were more "advanced" techniques, which only "authorized" people could communicate to qualified disciples. Some would have taken the bait, made contact with the author, paid huge sums to receive techniques that he had put together either by using their imagination or by copying them from some esoteric book ... These are things that happen, this is human nature. However, the real researchers would surely have been able to recognize the strength, the inherent self-sufficient evidence of the original text. ¹⁶

¹⁶ Such a book will be useful to review what was explained during Initiation. There is

It was a misfortune that no one had written such a book! For the first time I dared to let my thoughts dwell on what would have happened if I had written such a book. The purpose of the book would have been to summarize the totality of what I knew about *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya* by harmonizing theory and techniques in a clean, rational vision.

I had a model in mind: Theos Bernard *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience* [1943] With this text, very ancient techniques become current, feasible, clear before the eyes of intuition.¹⁷ My intention was certainly not to lay the foundations of a new school of *Kriya*. I wanted to stay away from rhetorical claims of legitimacy and, above all, from enigmatic phrases intended to seduce the reader and arouse curiosity in his mind!¹⁸

The book I imagined would not be a threat to the activity of honest *Kriya* teachers. Good teachers are and will always be in demand, in any field. But how to explain this to them without colliding with the conditioning ingrained in their own "brain chemistry"? Certainly, some *Kriya* teachers – those who live by means of the donations received during initiations and, thanks to the bond of secrecy, exercise their power over people – would have considered the book a threat to their activities. Perhaps what seemed virtually eternal to some (living like a lord, surrounded by people ready to satisfy all their whims in the hope of receiving the crumbs of hypothetical "secrets") could change, and they would fear this.

They would have tried to destroy the reliability of this book with merciless censorship. I could already imagine their scornful comments as they quickly leafed through it: "It contains only fantasies that have nothing to do with the teaching of *Babaji* and *Lahiri Mahasaya*. It spreads a false

in fact a frenzy that accompanies a traditional *Kriya* initiation where all the practical instructions are transmitted hastily in one single lesson! This is what happens with mass initiations. Within a few days, almost all details are forgotten and one goes through a crisis. The teacher is no longer there and the other fellow *kriyabans* dismiss their fraternal duties by stating they are not authorized to give counsels.

¹⁷ This extraordinary handbook, better than all the others, clarifies the teachings contained in the three fundamental texts of Tantrism: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita* and *Shiva Samhita*. Despite having been published many years ago and several texts of *Hatha Yoga* appearing recently, that book is still one of the best.

¹⁸ Some authors give only a hint to some procedures (either part of authentic *Kriya* or often concocted through imagination) and let the reader unsatisfied, compelled to go to the author in order to receive the secret let only glimpse.

teaching!" Some researchers might not have liked the book, baffled by the sobriety of a no-frills exposition. They would have rejected it, claiming that it did not contain "good vibrations".

It was necessary to write in a way that readers could feel my story as their story, so I tried so hard to rethink my approach. I would have written for people like myself: disillusioned with organizations and traveling *gurus*. They would have felt immense relief to come across such a book. I was already living in their happiness. Thanks to them, the book would continue to circulate, and who knows how many times it would come back before the eyes of those teachers who had condemned it. Sometimes these would have had to pretend not to notice that, during their seminars, some were going through it, leafing through it, thereby losing part of the conference ...

Plunging my gaze into the blue of the sky above the golden peaks of the mountains, I saw that strange situation as poignantly real. Each part of this dream developed in the space of a few seconds, invaded my consciousness like a torrent in flood, as if every part of it had already been tried and contemplated countless times.

A STRONG CONDITIONING HAD TO BE CONQUERED

It was time to face a great conditioning that I had received from my first *Kriya* school. Violating the dogma of secrecy and describing the techniques of *Kriya Yoga* was unthinkable for me. Today you can find on the net, as long as you know how to look for them, various sources where you can read various technical details about *Kriya*. At that time this did not exist and secrecy was strictly respected.

It was evident that the organization's justifications for demanding secrecy were wavering in the face of rational analysis. They claimed that secrecy helps "to maintain the purity of the teachings." Since PY slightly modified the *Kriya* technique from that originally taught by *Lahiri Mahasaya*, it would be better to state, "... to maintain the purity of the modifications."

But now I don't want to discuss these modifications but the concept of general secrecy regarding the techniques of *Kriya Yoga*.

I knew that sometimes the strict injunction had been ignored by common sense. Some people who were otherwise loyal to the organization had, under exceptional circumstances, broken this rule. I think of what happened when a Catholic priest, who sincerely wanted to learn *Kriya*, was unable to receive it due to a question of conscience that involved signing the application form for lessons. That form included a promise for him that was incompatible with his faith. Fortunately, that priest nevertheless found a *kriyaban* who explained the technique to him and shared his lessons with

him (this action that the kriyaban was strictly forbidden to do.)¹⁹

Also how could I crudely challenge the sacredness of the *Guru-disciple* relationship as the only way to receive the *Kriya* teachings? However I tried to think, my heart was in great conflict.

One evening I recalled the episode of the "investiture" of *Vivekananda* (*Naren*) by his *Guru Ramakrishna*. I had read that one day, towards the end of his earthly existence, *Ramakrishna* entered *Samadhi* while his disciple was near him. *Vivekananda* began to feel a strong current, then passed out. When he came to his senses, his *Guru*, crying, whispered to him: "O my *Naren*, today I have given you everything, now I have become a poor fakir, I have nothing; with this power you will do immense good in the world". *Ramakrishna* later explained that the powers he had passed on to *Vivekananda* could not be used by his disciple to accelerate his own spiritual realization – because each one has to bear this toil alone; they would help him in his future mission as a spiritual teacher.

With this image, my unconscious clearly warned me not to give in to the temptation to throw away something valid and precious. The *Guru-disciple* relationship, when created, is something great that could neither be questioned nor diminished.

I read again Dostoevsky's unforgettable, extraordinary speech on the role of elderly fathers – Starec – in Russian monasteries (*The Brothers Karamazov*):

What was such an elder? An elder was one who took your soul, your will, into his soul and his will. When you choose an elder, you renounce your own will and yield it to him in complete submission, complete self-abnegation. This novitiate, this terrible school of abnegation, is undertaken voluntarily, in the hope of self-conquest, of self-mastery, in order, after a life of obedience, to attain perfect freedom, that is, from self; to escape the lot of those who have lived their whole life without finding their true selves in themselves." (Translated by Constance Garnett)

This excerpt is fantastic, truly inspiring!

My reflections reached a dead end – for months. It was very difficult to put all the essential points of my reasoning in a logical order. I tried to think sequentially but either the mental and physical fatigue had weakened my ability to reason or various conditioning engraved in my brain acted as entities that had a life of their own. Whenever I tried to organize my vision into a well integrated and coherent whole, it appeared to me, for one reason

¹⁹ I am not advocating breaking a vow made to an organization that is sustained by the proceeds of the sales of didactic material. To those persons who can become students, let them pay the little money required and receive their set of lessons.

or another, like a monstrosity.

IMPORTANT UNDERSTANDING

In those days I resumed the practice of the so-called "Incremental routines."

²⁰ I dwelt in particular on those techniques that deal with untying the knot of the heart. This knot is also called *Vishnu Granthi*. The *Vishnu* Deity is the Lord of conservation: the knot of the heart supports the desire to place one's trust in religious traditions and authorities, especially when their teachings and dogmas are presented in the suggestive setting of a solemn ceremony. An incremental routine that acts strongly on the knot of the heart makes you discover your inner dignity and no one deceives you anymore. It acts as a gigantic injection of courage. Your thinking becomes compact, with a solidity that the suggestions of other people are not able to affect or corrupt. It was the effect of these routines that helped me bring more clarity to my thoughts.

The first thing that became clear to me was that in my life I had never really experienced the *Guru-disciple* relationship. My first *Kriya* organization had made me believe that I had a *Guru* – while in fact I was light years away from having one. While the great examples of the *Guru-disciple* relationship were based on a true physical encounter between two people, my relationship was purely ideal. I had lived for years among people who claimed to humbly follow their *Guru*, yet, like me, they had never met him physically. We all loved believing in something that comforted us and encouraged us to move forward.

We were told that: "It is the *Guru* who introduces you to God. There is no other way to achieve salvation." They also convinced us that the *Guru* was a special helper chosen by God Himself even before we started looking for the spiritual path: he would burn part of our *Karma*.

Having been initiated into *Kriya* by legitimate channels (authorized disciples), we tried to make the *Guru*, no longer present on this physical plane, a real presence in our life. We lived in this fascinating conviction which now appeared to me as a real illusion, a deception of my mind.

For many people in my organization, God and the *Guru* were the same entity. A representative of my organization said to me, "Don't you understand that *Guruji* and the Divine Mother are the same reality"? I had easily accepted this fact, now it no longer seemed to me an indisputable truth.

²⁰ Incremental routine means to utilize one single technique at a time, increasing gradually the number of its repetitions up to reach a great amount of them. I will describe this opportunity in chapter 13.

From believing that the *Guru* and God are the same reality came the idea that the organization founded by the *Guru* was not just an institution that dealt with spreading the teachings of the Master but was the only link between God and those who want to progress spiritually through *Kriya Yoga*.

Since according to them the *Kriya* learned outside the organization had no value, the demand for secrecy follows in an obvious way. This request allowed the myth of the irreplaceable role of the organization to be kept alive.

My organization was really like a church. PY's teaching was absolutely religious in nature. But, I reflected, in every religion there is discretion, not secrecy. Discretion comes naturally to intelligent and sensitive people, secrecy is irrational, unnatural, and therefore requires a solemn vow. The threat of possible calamities that would happen to those who violate the dogma of secrecy clashes with everything we read in the biographies of the saints. It fits perfectly with the esoteric-magical dimension of certain brotherhoods – indeed, secrecy is indispensable to their existence. The oath of secrecy has nothing to do with the spiritual dimension.

One evening while I was practicing *Kriya Pranayama* with my tongue in *Kechari Mudra* I had the inner vision of three beautiful mountains. The central one, the tallest, was black and shaped like an arrowhead made of obsidian. My heart exulted, I was madly in love with that image; I found myself crying for joy. I remained as calm as possible while I felt a particular force and pressure that increased and tightened the entire area of my chest with a squeeze of bliss.

That image was strong, very vivid in front of me. There was nothing more beautiful; it made me vibrate with love. I had the impression that I had cast a glance at the indistinct sources from which my present course of life originated. It was as if an inner thread tied all my past actions to that image, receiving sense and meaning from it.

That mountain was for me the symbol of the universal mystical path. It spoke to my intuition: "A Master who grants you initiation may be very important to your spiritual development, but your personal effort when you remain alone is much more important. In every *Guru-disciple* relationship there comes a time when you remain alone. You awaken to the realization that your path is a lonely flight between you and your inner Self. The *Guru-disciple* relationship is an illusion – useful and comfortable – that appears real as long as you are not annihilated by what goes beyond your own mind."

This experience freed me from the illusion of the *Guru-disciple* relationship as something definitive, which remains eternally unchangeable.

Undoubtedly, I recognized that I had been helped, inspired by several human beings who had lived on this planet.

I visualized a network: each spiritual seeker was like a junction of that network and from this junction various connections departed, such as those between the neurons of the brain. When a single individual strives to advance to a state located beyond the common dimension of living, the state of his consciousness reverberates along the threads of that network in immediate proximity. That soul will be helped by the positive response of others and, of course, will be slowed down by the indolence and apathy of others. I believe that those who follow the spiritual path carry forward the evolution of many other people. This network that connects us all is the *Collective Unconscious*.²¹

For example, Beethoven's life and works gave direction to my search for meaning in life. Yes, I was alone, but not totally alone. What Beethoven did, his life, his music, influenced my existence and dragged it forward, towards Infinity. I have already described the enormous influence on my spiritual path that the figure of *Mère* (disciple of *Sri Aurobindo*) had.

One evening, after a long walk, dulled by sudden fatigue, I dragged myself home. Worn out of my thoughts, the problem of the *Guru-disciple* relationship began to emerge obscurely, more as a wound than as a theory that unfolds its myths. I set the CD player with the "repeat" function on the second movement of Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto* ... Has it ever happened that someone, laden with the blessings of the *Guru* received from attending all possible initiation ceremonies held by "legitimate" channels, had he ever practiced *Kriya* with that dignity and courage with which Beethoven had challenged his destiny?

I turned off the light and watched the sun set in the distance behind the trees on top of a hill. The silhouette of a cypress partly eclipsed the large disc of the sun, red as blood. That was the eternal beauty! That was

²¹ To Freud the Unconscious was similar to a depot full of old "removed" things that we cannot recall to consciousness - refused by a nearly automatic act of the will. Jung discovered a deeper level of it: the Collective Unconscious which links all human beings by the deepest layers of their psyche. The Collective Unconscious is "inherited with our cerebral structure" and consists of "the human systems of reacting" to the most intense events that can happen in one's lifetime: the birth of a child, marriage, death of a loved one, serious illness, family crisis, true love, natural disasters, war...

the reality that had always guided me in my search. During this time the book *Purana Purusha* came as a blessing in my life.

Purana Purusha

This book is certainly the most beautiful biography of *Lahiri Mahasaya*. It was written by the emeritus *Kriya Master Ashoke Kumar Chatterjee* who relied on the diaries of *Lahiri Mahasaya* and the personal assistance of one of *Lahiri Mahasaya*'s grandsons, *Satya Charan Lahiri* (1905 - 1978) who physically owned those diaries. The book came out in Bengali (later in French and English.) It contains a selection of the most important parts of *Lahiri Mahasaya*'s diaries.

Although this text does not seem to respect any logical order in the arrangement of the arguments and contains an infinite number of repetitions and rhetorical phrases, it helps us to understand the personality of *Lahiri Mahasaya* – with this, the core of *Kriya* can be intuited with the rapidity of a arrow. I read this book in the Summer taking it with me to the country; many times, after having read a part of it, I looked at the distant mountains and repeated to myself "Oh, finally ...!". I was looking at the photograph of *Lahiri Mahasaya* on the cover. Who knows what high state he was in when that photo was taken! I observed horizontal lines on his forehead, eyebrows raised as in *Shambhavi Mudra*, where awareness is established at the top of the head; a slight tension in his chin seemed to reveal that he was practicing *Kechari Mudra*. During those days his figure, with that slight smile full of bliss, was a shining sun in my heart; it was the symbol of the perfection I wanted to achieve.

This book impresses with its ability to communicate abstract concepts in very few words. For example, it stated that the whole path of *Kriya* was nothing but a great adventure which begins with *dynamic Prana* and ends with *static Prana*. A thrill of delight occurs when one encounters phrases that have a light in them, for example "*Kutastha* is God, he is the supreme *Brahma*." Remarkable is the great importance that *Lahiri* attached to *Pranayama*, *Thokar* and *Yoni Mudra*. *Lahiri Mahasaya* refused to be worshiped as a God. In fact he said that the *Guru* cannot be considered identical with God. This is a fact that some of His followers seem to have forgotten. In fact, he said: "I do not maintain a barrier between the true *Guru* (the Divine) and the disciple."

In fact, he added that he wanted to be considered as a "mirror". In other words, each *kriyaban* would have to look to Him not as an unattainable ideal, but as the personification of all the wisdom and spiritual realization that, in due time, the practice of *Kriya* would be able to bring out. When the *kriyaban* realizes that his *Guru* is the personification of what

potentially resides in him, of what he himself will one day become, then the mirror can be "thrown away".

Yes, like it or not, it says just like that: *thrown away*. People who have been instructed with the usual dogmas about the *Guru*-disciple relationship cannot fully understand the impact of these words, if they did they would encounter an intimate contradiction. To meet the truth, it takes courage combined with an intelligent, discriminating approach that helps to abandon one's illusions, especially those that are pleasant and comfortable. In addition to courage, a good brain is also needed to overcome the tendency to suggestibility.

HOW CAN A PERSON LEARN THE ORIGINAL KRIYA WHEN THEY DON'T HAVE THE LUCK TO MEET A TRUE GURU?

Every now and then I consulted a couple of Forums dedicated to *Kriya Yoga*. My wish was to see if other *kriyabans* had the same problems as me in seeking free information on unmodified *Kriya*. Many people were looking for information on *Kechari Mudra*: if I had had their email, I would have immediately sent them all possible information.

I was hurt by the pedantic tone of some users of the Forum who censored the legitimate curiosity of other researchers. With a biased tenderness, betraying the lowest form of consideration, they continued to consider the desire to deepen the practice of *Kriya* as a "dangerous mania." They tended to silence the seekers by advising them to continue practicing what they had received and not look for anything else.

They spoke in the same tone used by my old "Ministers". Although I felt distant from that world, that period of my life wasn't that far off. It was my world of yesterday.

I wondered how those wise and expert "advisers" of the Forum dared to enter (uninvited) the intimate dimension of the spiritual journey of a *kriyaban* they knew nothing about, treating him as a superficial beginner! Was it just so difficult to answer honestly, "I don't have the information you're looking for"?

I happened to come across an extremely unpleasant discussion (in the same Forum) at the memory of which I feel my stomach turning. A person claimed to have had access to the *original Kriya*. He explained that authentic *original Kriya* masters still exist today but he did not consider it appropriate to share their names and addresses with others. I found this very stupid. I imagined that the petty idea of possessing a secret knowledge, not transferable to others, was the only thing that kept the disconnected pieces of his childish mind standing, avoiding him the sadness of realizing the nothingness that he was. Why should the beauty of

Original Kriya belong only to him?

The latter person released a document which had been written by a *Kriya* practitioner living in India. The name of the document was: "Truth and False behind *Kriya Yoga*." The author explains that it took him twenty years to understand the history of the *Kriya* path.

He describes the process of valid initiation. He explains that disciple and *Guru* must meet personally; the *Guru* tests that person and, if he decides to give this initiation, fixes the time and place for the initiation. The event normally takes place at the *Guru*'s house. A true *Guru* never travels to initiate people. The author of the document states that only if these rules are respected and only if the *Guru* has been authorized to give this initiation, does *Kriya* work, otherwise it is completely useless.

He explains that the authorization to teach *Kriya Yoga* was initially given by *Lahiri Mahasaya* to only a few people. That number decreased after his death. *Lahiri Mahasaya*'s main disciple was *Panchanan Bhattacharya* who was appointed as his successor. He only passed this authorization to five people. Over time, the situation became uncertain. Some new people were allowed to teach, some were not. Some taught correctly without modification, others with modifications. Some lineages are now closed.

This is the summary of that document. Now I ask the reader a careful consideration on one point: is it to be believed that if one receives a correct technique from a competent teacher, it will not work if the teacher has not been authorized? What sense would this fact have? I wonder if such a thing could be true in the field of spirituality.

I am convinced that this statement is an example of "magical, occult and esoteric thinking" which has nothing to do with the spiritual path. I know that the spiritual path is something inherently different from magical practices. The latter are based on empowering, modifying, extending the realm of the mind. The spiritual path is something else.

Think of the simplest spiritual act which is *Prayer*. Should we believe that it is valid only if it has been taught to us by an authorized minister? Is it not valid when it is uttered with sincere aspiration, when it comes from the heart?

I have witnessed the fact that some people who were not initiated by "authorized disciples" and who learned the techniques of *Kriya* in other ways, fully experienced its effectiveness. The foundation of the spiritual path is sincerity of heart and a commitment that knows no obstacles.

FINAL CONSIDERATION THAT ENCOURAGED ME TO WRITE THE BOOK

I explained how in my reflections the first thing that became clear to me was that in my life I had not really experienced the *Guru-disciple* relationship. Now let's face a second truth that now became clear to me.

In chapter 12 "How Kriya Yoga was born" I will discuss how we can find in certain practices of different spiritual paths clear references to procedures similar to those of *Kriya Yoga*. I will give the example of four mystical paths: *Inner Alchemy* (*Nei Dan*), *Hesychasm*, the practice of *Dhikr* or *Zikr* in *Sufi* brotherhoods and the *Radhasoami* movement.

If we study these movements carefully, the idea arises that *Lahiri Mahasaya's* work was to create a formidable synthesis of methods used centuries earlier by various mystics. In this perspective, the awe of revealing secrets that belong to a specific person disappears. Certainly we cannot speak of the personal advice that *Lahiri Mahasaya* gave to his disciples and not even guess his reflections that led him to make small variations to his teachings, focusing on some procedures rather than others.

A quiet confidence was born in me that I was not doing a wrong to this great Master by speaking openly, in the present age, of these spiritual procedures on which he based his admirable synthesis. Certainly we cannot resign ourselves, in order to learn *Kriya*, to the inevitable decision to leave for India to look for an authorized *Guru*!

In the following days I had improved the writing of my notes on the different *Kriya* techniques that I had learned during various seminars and I printed some copies for friends who had not received all the levels of *Kriya*. I bought a computer and, as a voluntary prisoner, reduced my social life to a minimum to devote all of myself to writing. It was not easy to extract the essential core of *Kriya Yoga* from my substantial files of notes, drawn by different teachers. I had the impression of finding myself reassembling a large puzzle, without having any preview of what would appear in the end.

In the first part of the book I summarized the story of my spiritual quest while I devoted the second part to sharing what I knew about the theory and practice of *Kriya Yoga*. Other parts were devoted to studying a good plan for practicing *Kriya* and therefore to face a difficult problem: what a *kriyaban* should have done to keep his initial enthusiasm and resist the corrosion of time. It is well known that many *kriyabans* fail to keep their interest and dedication to the practice alive.

The time it took to write the book was much longer than expected. My friends who were informed of my intent were perplexed and said that I

would never put an end to the undertaking. Yet I did not feel any urgency, I wanted to live that quiet period of my life, appreciating the sense of calm and fulfillment that comes to those who dedicate all their efforts to a single purpose. One day the book was ready and with the help of a friend, put online with total tranquility.

After a couple of months came the reaction of the one who had been my second teacher. During a seminar he had commented on my action as that of one who wants to do business with *Kriya*. He called me an "intellectual prostitute." My reaction was strange: that night I was unable to sleep, yet I was deeply satisfied. Finally there was a book on *Kriya* easily accessible to all.

<i>Was entstanden ist, das muß vergehen!</i>	What was created, must perish!
--	--------------------------------

Was vergangen, auferstehen!

What perished, revive!

Hör auf zu beben!

Cease from trembling!

Bereite dich zu leben!

Prepare yourself to live!

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

PART II: TECHNIQUES OF LAHIRI MAHASAYA'S KRIYA YOGA

Disclaimer

The techniques described here are shown for study purposes only, to serve as a comparison with the work of other researchers. From this sharing I hope there will be intelligent feedback. Comments, criticisms, corrections and additions will be well received. Before you start asking yourself all the strangest questions possible and imaginable, read this book in its entirety so that you have a complete understanding of the subject. You will find that many questions are answered as you continue reading.

I want to clarify that this book is not a Kriya Yoga manual! Perhaps in the future I will write one and then I will tackle the problem of how to divide the whole topic into different lessons trying, for each learning phase, to provide all the necessary advice. However, certain techniques cannot be learned by reading a manual. There are delicate techniques such as Maha Mudra, Kriya Pranayama, Thokar, Yoni Mudra that it is unthinkable to learn without the help of an expert who controls their execution. Each person is different so it is not possible to predict what effects an intensive practice might have on a particular individual.

The author assumes no liability in the event of negative results, particularly in the event that one decides to practice the techniques without seeking the supervision of an expert. Those who intend to carry on this practice should do so with the due sense of the sacred and the awareness of the richness it can bring into their life. While everyone has the right and duty to control their destiny, securing the advice or guidance of an expert is highly recommended.

N.B. When you go to an expert, it is necessary to communicate the existence of any physical problems, such as hypertension, lung problems, signs of hyperventilation ... If you have particular physical problems, an expert can recommend a delicate form of Kriya Pranayama and Mudra. connected to it - and, if necessary, he might recommend practicing them only mentally. ¹

¹ To check if refinements have been added to the description of the techniques, visit www.kriyayogainfo.net at least once a year.

CHAPTER 6

LAHIRI MAHASAYA'S KRIYA YOGA – FIRST PART

INTRODUCTION

Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya Yoga techniques are explained in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 of this book.

First Kriya level

The purpose of the *First Level of Kriya* is to overcome the restlessness of the mind. This is done by making the breath calm, subtle. Breath and mind are in fact closely related.

This first level is based on the technique of *Kriya Pranayama*. If you want to know how this *Kriya Pranayama* works you can consult my commentary on a verse of the *Bhagavad Gita* that you find in the last part of this chapter.

With the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* two energies (*Prana* and *Apana*) that come into operation in the spine merge together. Their union gives rise to a new state of energy in the body called *Samana*. This *Samana* enters the thinnest channel of the spine. A particular state occurs in our consciousness. *Patanjali* defines this state as "*Pratyahara*" which means "withdrawal of the senses".

In that state the mind is perfectly calm and can remain absorbed in the meditative state. That state is subtle and can be considered the first step on the spiritual path.

While trying to master the *First Level of Kriya Yoga*, a *kriyaban* may wish to explore and use other *Kriya* procedures. What would be important is obtaining *Kechari Mudra*. This *Mudra* (explained in chapter 7) is undoubtedly of great value as it creates perfection in *Kriya Pranayama* and greatly calms the functions of the mind. Other events of a spiritual nature can happen. The higher stages of *Kriya* can also manifest spontaneously.

LOCATION OF THE CHAKRAS

The *Chakras* are subtle astral organs located within the spine – ideal steps of a mystical ladder that leads the consciousness of the individual to encounter the highest ecstatic experience. In *Kriya Yoga* it is not important to visualize a *Chakra* with petals, with the *Yantra*, with the *Bija Mantra* in its center ... and with everything you find in the classic books of *Hatha Yoga* or *New Age* orientation; it is important instead to perceive approximately its location. The practice of *Kriya Yoga* will refine an initial approximate localization.

When certain particular conditions are established – mental silence, relaxation of the body, intense spiritual aspiration – the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* will take, so to speak, the "inner road" and the *Spiritual Reality* will manifest as something concrete, independent of visualizations and whims of the mind. You will then realize the reality of the *Chakras* in the astral dimension, you will be able to listen to their astral vibrations as well as you will perceive particular tones of light emanating from their locations. The practice of *Kechari Mudra* will favor this experience especially at times when the breath becomes extremely subtle.

The nature of each *Chakra* has two aspects, one internal and one external. The internal aspect of a *Chakra*, its essence, is a vibration of "light" that attracts the awareness upwards, towards the Spirit. The external aspect of a *Chakra*, its physical side, is a diffused "light" that awakens and sustains the life of the physical body.

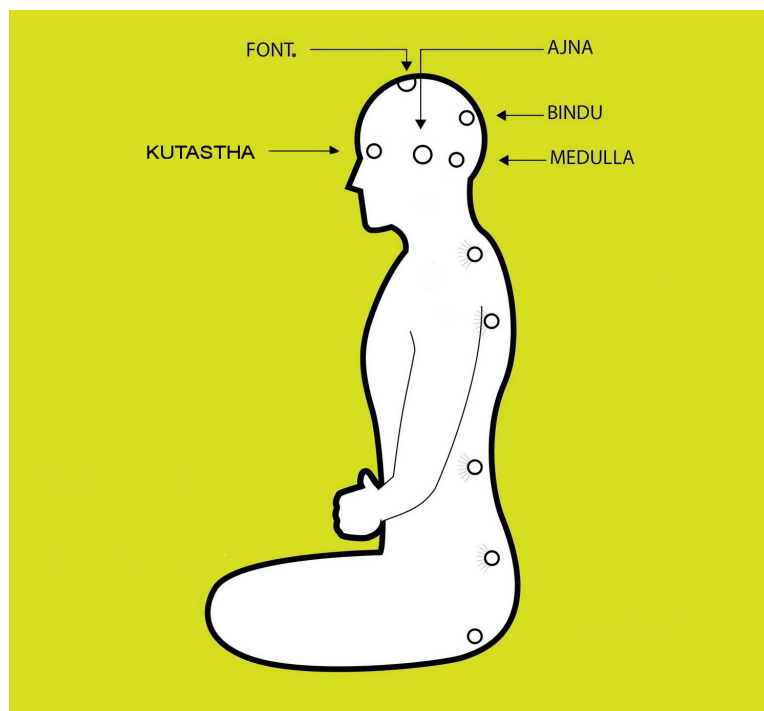


Fig.1 Location of the Chakras

When you go up the spine during *Kriya Pranayama*, it is natural to feel the *Chakras* as small "lights" that illuminate the hollow tube which is the spinal column. Then when you go down, the *Chakras* are perceived as organs that distribute energy in the body. Rays of light depart from the seat of each *Chakra* and revive that part of the body that is in front of them.

The first *Chakra*, ***Muladhara*** is located at the base of the spinal column just above the region of the coccyx; the second *Chakra*, ***Swadhisthana***, is located in the sacral region halfway between *Muladhara* and the third *Chakra*; the third *Chakra*, ***Manipura***, is in the lumbar region

at the level of the navel.

The fourth *Chakra*, *Anahata*, (more simply called the *Heart Chakra*) is in the dorsal region; its location can be identified by approaching the shoulder blades and concentrating on the tense muscles between them. The fifth *Chakra*, *Vishuddha*, is located where the neck joins the shoulders. Its seat can be identified by swinging the head sideways, keeping the torso firmly, concentrating on the point where a particular sound is perceived as of something being ground.

The sixth *Chakra* is called *Ajna*. The *Medulla* and the point between the eyebrows (*Kutastha*) are closely related to *Ajna* and cannot be considered separate entities. *Medulla* is considered the physical counterpart of *Ajna Chakra*. What matters is that by finding the stability of concentration in each of the three points, the spiritual eye, a luminous point in the center of an infinite spherical radiance, appears to the inner vision. This experience is the royal entrance into the spiritual dimension. Sometimes the term *Bhrumadhya* is used in place of *Kutastha*.

In order to locate *Medulla* which is at the top of the spine, the chin is raised and the neck muscles at the base of the occipital bone are stretched; then we focus on the small cavity under that bone. *Medulla* is located right in front of this cavity.

Moving from the *Medulla* seat towards the point between the eyebrows it is not difficult to perceive the *Ajna Chakra* seat: you swing your head sideways (a few centimeters to the left and then to the right) trying to perceive something that connects the two temples. The *Ajna Chakra* site is identified by focusing attention at the intersection point of two ideal lines: the one that connects the *Medulla* site with the point between the eyebrows and the one that connects the two temples.

The energy flowing through the tip of the tongue during *Kechari Mudra* stimulates and stimulates the *Pituitary* (or *Hypophysis*) *gland*. This is an endocrine gland about the size of a pea. It forms a protrusion on the floor of the *Hypothalamus*. It is necessary to clarify this because a famous *Kriya* school recommends focusing on this gland to get the experience of the spiritual eye.

The same school emphasizes the role of the *Pineal gland*. This is another small endocrine gland that is shaped like a small pine cone (symbolically, many spiritual organizations have used the pine cone as an icon). It is located behind the *Pituitary* gland in the back of the *third ventricle* of the brain. Having full experience of the white spiritual Light after long concentration on the *Pineal gland* is considered the last action to be done in order to perfect the meditation before getting lost in the state of *Samadhi*.

Bindu is located in the occipital region and is not considered a *Chakra* in and of itself. However it is a very important spiritual center

because it functions as a door that leads awareness to the **Sahasrara** – the seventh *Chakra* located at the top of the head. *Bindu* is located where the hairline forms a kind of vortex. (This is the *Sikha* point where *Hindus*, with shaved heads, keep a lock of hair.)

In order to become aware of the *Sahasrara* some schools recommend concentrating on the **Fontanel** [we refer to the anterior *Fontanel* also called "*Bregma*".]

The **eighth Chakra** is the highest spiritual center that we will deal with (chapter 14.) It is located about 30 centimeters above the *Fontanel*.

POSITION SUITABLE FOR MEDITATION

We sit facing the East. According to *Patanjali*, the position of the *Yogi* (*Asana*) must be stable and comfortable.

Half-lotus: Most *kriyabans* are comfortable sitting in this position which has been used for meditation since time immemorial because it provides a comfortable sitting position that is very easy to achieve. The secret is to keep an erect spine by sitting on the edge of a thick pillow so that the buttocks are slightly raised. You can sit cross-legged while your knees are on the floor.

Lift your left foot and bring it towards your body so that the sole of the left foot fits snugly on the inside of the right thigh. Pull the heel of the left foot as far as possible towards the groin. The right leg is bent at the knee and the right foot is placed comfortably over the left thigh or calf or both. The right knee is lowered as far as possible towards the floor. When the legs get tired, reverse them to prolong the position.

The best position for the hands is with interlocked fingers as can be seen in the famous photo of *Lahiri Mahasaya*. This creates a good balance of energies from the right hand to the left and vice versa. The position of the hands for meditation and for *Pranayama* is the same as it moves from *Pranayama* to meditation seamlessly. Usually we don't even realize it.

When there are health problems or particular physical conditions, it can be providential to practice half lotus on a chair, as long as it has no armrests and is large enough. This way, one leg at a time can be lowered and the knee joint relaxed!

Siddhasana: (Perfect Pose) is of medium difficulty. The sole of the left foot is placed against the right thigh while the heel presses on the perineum. The right heel is placed against the pubic bone. This position of the legs, combined with *Kechari Mudra*, closes the pranic circuit and makes *Kriya Pranayama* easy and profitable. It is explained that this position helps to become aware of the movements of *Prana*.

Padmasana: (Lotus position) is a difficult position, sometimes impossible to sustain beyond a few minutes. The right foot is placed on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh with the soles of the feet facing upwards. It is explained that, accompanied by *Kechari* and *Shambhavi Mudra*, this position creates an energetic condition in the body suitable for producing the experience of the internal light that comes from each *Chakra*. It helps to keep the torso erect when, upon reaching deep *Pratyahara*, it tends to bend or fall. Sitting in *Padmasana* is uncomfortable for a beginner, the knees and ankles are in intense pain. Personally, I do not advise anyone to perform this difficult position. There are *yogis* who have had the cartilage removed from their knees after they had imposed the *Padmasana* position on their limbs for years.

KRIYA PRANAYAMA

Preliminary practice before starting Kriya Pranayama

Breathe normally. Chant *Om* with your voice or mentally (it would be better to say "set the *Mantra Om*") in each of the six *Chakras* from *Muladhara* to *Medulla*. Then repeat *Om* a second time in the *Medulla* and in each of the remaining *Chakras* descending down to *Muladhara*. Do this without losing the focus of the inner gaze in *Kutastha*. In short: one *Om* for each *Chakra* going up; one *Om* for each *Chakra* going down. A full round consists of a total of 12 *Om*. It is recommended to repeat this action 12 times. Proceed slowly: It has been explained that one round should take 44 seconds.

Now begins the great adventure with *Kriya Pranayama* proper. This technique is very subtle. It is learned using attention and intuition. It takes months and months to master it. In my opinion there are four basic stages through which this procedure is mastered: let us try to tackle them one at a time and don't move on to the next until we feel confident in the level we are at.

FIRST STAGE

Do not practice on a full stomach. Wait one hour after breakfast and two to three hours after a normal meal. Assume the meditation position. Sit facing East. From now on you can use the trick described above to sit on the edge of a thick pillow so that your buttocks are slightly raised. The chin is slightly kept inside (the neck and nape muscles maintain a constant slight tension.) The fingers are intertwined as *Lahiri Mahasaya* holds them in the well-known photo. Mouth and eyes are closed. The center of awareness is located in *Medulla* while the inner gaze effortlessly converges on *Kutastha*.

Take a series of deep breaths producing a sound in your throat

Turn your tongue back as far as possible (baby *Kechari*) by dilating the throat or assume the position of the real *Kechari* if you are already able.

Inhale deeply through your nose producing a hissing sound with your throat.² To make sure the sound is correct, try to increase the friction of the air passing through the throat. Also during exhalation make sure that there is a small restriction of the air coming out of the lungs in order to produce the hissing sound. This way of breathing is called "*Ujjayi*". Don't strain. Maintain a slow, deep rhythm to your breathing. If the environment is perfectly quiet, a person by your side will be able to hear a feeble sound in your breath, nothing if the person is sitting at a distance.

Breathing should be mainly abdominal. This means that during inhalation, the upper part of the chest remains immobile or almost motionless, the shoulders are not raised, while the abdomen expands. During exhalation, the abdomen returns. During the last part of the exhalation, there is a clear perception of the navel moving towards the spine. By refining this experience – becoming more aware of the inward movement of the navel and the action of the diaphragm muscles – you will feel a sensation of joy.

Take a deep breath, then another: don't worry about the length of the inhalation and exhalation. (After a few breaths you will find that your breath naturally lengthens. It is also observed that the exhalation is slightly longer than the inhalation.)

Inhalation and exhalation are approximately the same length. A *Kriya* breath, inhalation plus exhalation, should take about 30 seconds but you can also start with 12 seconds.³

In *Kriya Pranayama* there is a short breath pause between inhalation and exhalation as well as between exhalation and inhalation: each of these pauses lasts at least 1-2 seconds. These two pauses are natural, spontaneous. When the movement of the air is suspended, the activity of the mind is also suspended. Our awareness slips into these spaces and knows a state of Tranquility.

Lahiri Mahasaya compares the procedure of *Kriya Pranayama* to the

² For a beginner this sound is similar to the amplified background noise of a loudspeaker – a quiet *schhhh... /ʃ/*. There is only a slight hiss during exhalation. The perfection of the sound will be reached through *Kechari Mudra* proper. The sound of inhalation will be very subtle, while the exhaling sound will be flute-like: *Sheee Sheee* [ʃi:]. This sound is also called *Kundalini Mantra*. When it appears it is a sign that *Pranayama* has been performed well.

³ Reference literature says that perfect *Kriya Pranayama* is 80 breaths per hour – about 45 seconds per breath. A beginner is far away from reaching such rhythm.

cleaning of a sword. This is rubbed from tail to tip and vice versa and in this process a sound is emitted. By rubbing, the two breaths make the Divine Light visible in *Kutastha*. Soon the *Prana* begins to withdraw within *Sushumna* and the breath flows in a thin stream like a silken thread but extremely powerful.

Count the number of breaths using a *Mala* [rosary beads] or the phalanges of the fingers. To begin practice 12 breaths. Over time you will increase by 12 in 12: then you will practice 24, 36, 48 ... breaths, up to a maximum of 144 breaths. For a few days, practice only what we have explained.

Once this has become natural, try to improve your practice by perceiving the *Prana* (energy) moving within the spine.

Learn to feel a cool current rising through the spine on inhalation and a warm thread of energy flowing down the spine on exhalation. Anyone can realize that the breath that enters and leaves the body has the sensations of coolness and warmth embedded in it. We will use this tool to go from simply imagining the spinal canal to actually feeling it.

Particular attention to the fifth *Chakra* (located at the height of the throat) will help you with this. In *Kriya Pranayama* it is explained that the point where you introduce or expel the breath is not the nose, but the inside of the throat. The movement of *Prana* in the spine is set in motion quite easily by concentrating on the anterior side of the throat *Chakra*.

Precisely: during the inhalation concentrate on the front part of the fifth *Chakra*. Feel (become aware) that the *Prana* is flowing through this *Chakra* into your body. Then during the exhalation learn to guide the vibration of *Prana* to revive the spinal channel from top to bottom.

This particular breathing through the front part of the *Vishuddha* in fact produces a kind of vacuum in the throat: with this effect the *Prana* is not only moved from the nose to the throat but raised within the spine as if you had a syringe. In fact, it is advisable to imagine the movement of the breath as if it happened through a straw. In this way the breath becomes long and thin and succeeds in making you perceive well the substance of which the spinal cord is made.

As you inhale, you will feel a fresh current rising through your spine. During exhalation, a current will be felt as a thread of warm energy descending into the spine.

This current travels between the base of the spine to the *Medulla*, where the sixth *Chakra* is located – so you don't try to get to the point between the eyebrows. The *Medulla Oblongata* is where *Prana* enters the

Sushumna.

For a few weeks focus only on this new detail of *Kriya Pranayama*. You will control the flow of *Prana* with the power of the will, always remaining relaxed. The breath will become thinner and slow down. Don't be in a hurry to add the next instruction to your practice. Enjoy in complete tranquility for a long time, or rather a few months, what has been explained up to now.

After the practice of Kriya Pranayama

Remain motionless for at least 10 minutes conscious of your breathing which proceeds naturally with its own rhythm. You can choose to visualize it as a sweet energy rising and falling down your spine. In this way the breathing will easily become calmer, almost tending to disappear.

Further clarification of what it means to converge the inner gaze on Kutastha

Let's clarify this important detail because it will become fundamental throughout the practice of *Kriya Pranayama*.

Try to create a gentle movement as if to bring the two eyebrows slightly closer towards the center of the forehead. This movement is barely physical, mostly just an intention. Under normal circumstances an outside observer will not notice such movement even though they may notice it early on. With practice one also discovers that this internal movement also appears to draw the center of the brain forward towards the point between the eyebrows. Don't force the eyes. Just let them naturally gravitate towards the sensation of forming a vertical furrow between the eyebrows. It is a habit that you must learn to cultivate.

However, be careful to respect what we explained in the first point, namely that the center of awareness always remains in the *Medulla* while the inner gaze converges effortlessly on *Kutastha*.

During the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* one is taught to perceive with closed eyes, in the point between the eyebrows, any, even if very weak, form of light or color. We do not visualize anything but simply become aware of what is in front of us. One can also realize how the sound of breathing amplifies this perception of light. If one goes ahead like this, breath by breath, it is possible to realize how even the faintest sensation of light transforms into a clear light. Then the various scattered lights gather into a round circular light known as the Spiritual Eye or "Single Eye".

Well this beautiful experience does not happen to all those who practice. We discover that to approach this experience it is not correct to force

yourself to move in the direction of our gaze but to move backwards, towards the back of the spine where the *Medulla* and the *Pineal gland* are located. This is how a great experience of inner light occurs.

If course, bringing attention to the point between the eyebrows with eyes open during our day is a correct attitude to invite the Divine to accompany us during all life's experiences. But when we practice *Kriya* meditation this attention must not remain "in front" but move "behind" as we have explained.

SECOND STAGE

Learn to add the following action to the perception of the spinal current: during the inhalation, chant *Om* mentally in each of the six *Chakras* from *Muladhara* to the *Medulla*. During the exhalation, mentally chant *Om* in the *Medulla* and in each of the remaining *Chakras* going down towards *Muladhara*. So during each breath, *Om* will be mentally chanted 12 times. This is reminiscent of what we did in the preliminary exercise.

It is clear that ascending and descending along the spine producing sound in the throat, perceiving the sensations of cool and warm and at the same time placing *Om* in each *Chakra* is difficult but *Lahiri Mahasaya* invites us to pursue this goal by explaining that without chanting *Om* in each *Chakra*, all kinds of useless thoughts will arise to disturb us.

This mental chant of *Om* is an aid in making the described procedure easier. You simply teach your awareness to be more disciplined, to patiently obey you as you go up and down the spine. Applying this instruction, the mind will not get distracted by moving in different directions and will no longer abandon the path of the spine. It is explained that without the mental chanting of *Om*, *Kriya* is devoid of substance.

Possibility of listening to the inner sounds while mentally chanting Om in each Chakra

During this practice it may happen to listen to inner sounds. I am not referring to the sound of breathing but to something else. They could come from the activity of the *Chakras*. The practitioner may hear a continuous ringing similar to that of a bell in the distance. This experience could change into the sound of "many waters". This is the true sound of *Om*. *Lahiri Mahasaya* describes this sound as "produced by many people who keep hitting the disc of a bell" and explains that it is "continuous like oil flowing from a container". Surely when you listen to the sound of flowing waters or waves lashing the rocks, you will find yourself in an ecstatic state.

A very important fact to understand is that the event of perceiving these sounds is not produced by the intensity of a single moment of deep

concentration but by the sum of various efforts during the daily sessions of *Kriya* (by "effort" we mean the meticulous attention to any inner sound, no matter how faint it is.) What is essential is to carry on an unchangeable will to chase the echo of the *Om* mental chant until you get to perceive the astral sounds. Your ability to hear inner sounds will improve.

THIRD STAGE

Lahiri Mahasaya explained that after having practiced 48 repetitions of *Kriya Pranayama*, it is opportune to establish the center of one's awareness in the *Fontanel* or in the upper part of the head. This happens by assuming a particular position of the eyes.

The eyelids are closed or half closed. (*Lahiri Mahasaya* in his well-known portrait takes this position.) The eyes look upwards as much as possible, as if to look at the ceiling but without making any movement of the head. The slight tension that is felt in the muscles attached to the eyeballs gradually disappears and the position can be maintained quite easily. The observer can see the sclera (the white of the eye) below the iris because the lower eyelids almost always relax. By means of this position of the eyes, the *Prana* collects at the top of the head.

As you remain stable there, only a fraction of your awareness rises and falls in the spine.

At a certain moment you will have the impression of going through a state of mind that resembles falling asleep and then suddenly regaining full awareness, discovering that you are swimming in the spiritual light. It is like when an airplane emerges from the clouds in the clear transparent sky. This way of practicing *Kriya Pranayama* is truly intoxicating.

How to use the instructions concerning the first three stages of Kriya Pranayama

It is assumed that after a certain period of learning, a person will be able to practice *Kriya Pranayama* while respecting all these instructions at the same time. Hence: sounds, perception of currents, mental chanting of *Om*, raising consciousness to the crown of the head – all at the same time. This is the correct way to practice the technique of *Kriya Pranayama*.

Obviously there are many obstacles to overcome, for example being able to practice *Kechari Mudra*, having a lot of time available. I know many have decided to raise awareness at the top of the head after only 24 breaths – everyone can decide based on their own experience.

Further remarks before discussing the fourth and final stage

If by chance you have peeked at chapter 7 you will have read how you can get *Kechari Mudra* and practice *Kriya Pranayama* with it.

With this *Mudra* the exhalation that comes out of the nasal pharynx

has a subtle sound that is described as that of a small flute. Symbolically it is called the "*flute of Krishna*". This Sound is produced in the upper part of the nasal pharynx. After a long period of practice, the difference between the sound of inspiration and that of exhalation can no longer be distinguished. *Lahiri Mahasaya* described this sound as "similar to blowing air through a keyhole". He explained that it has the power to cut out any external factors that cause distraction including thoughts. Therefore he says that it is like: "a razor that cuts off everything that has a relationship with the mind". With the effortless intensification of this *shii shii* sound awakening of *Kundalini* can take place. In any case always allow this sound to completely absorb your mind.

Finally I would like to explain what is the best attitude to practice *Pranayama*.

Start each session of *Pranayama* trying to realize that it is a procedure which, in a certain sense, goes on by itself, automatically. The correct attitude is to do nothing but enjoy the good feeling of cool air rising up the spine and then warm air flowing down. The feeling of driving the energy up or down with effort is given up. The breath simply goes in and out of the lungs and from this arises an energetic movement in the spine. A sense of joy arises from this event. This way of practicing creates an extraordinarily strong sense of energy after a while. It is at this point that a devotional attitude can arise.

Those who by nature already possess this attitude can use it very easily. In fact, many practitioners report that, over time, they find it easier to let the "*Inner Guru*" perform the various *Kriya* breaths in their place. True *Kriya* begins when the technique happens automatically through the Inner Power and the Infinite Intelligence of the *Guru* that is inside each of us. We can say that the mind cannot control the movement of energy in the spine, only the *Guru* can.

FOURTH STAGE

Everything we have explained so far is still only a PREPARATION for a very, very profound *Pranayama* experience. This is exactly what we will try to describe in this "*Fourth stage*."

At the beginning of the *Kriya* path the breath is often unruly, it is difficult to guide it upwards within the spinal canal. This is because the paths of the *nadis* are blocked. Gradually, thanks to a continuous and persistent work of channeling the *Prana* along the spine, the *Prana* is finally internalized.

Then the breath will have a very subtle, almost imperceptible sound without constriction of the throat. As we have seen, the sign of good

Pranayama is that its sound is like that of a flute. This sound will seem to have a life of its own or will move without any effort on the part of the practitioner. This phase of *Pranayama* has been defined by *Lahiri Mahasaya* as "*Excellent Pranayama*" or **Uttam Pranayama**, a higher form of *Pranayama*. Consciousness and intoxication mix and the mind enters perfect stillness.

But what can happen to someone who has achieved this "*Excellent Pranayama*" is unbelievable. There will come a day when finally the breathing of the air is reduced to a point, in other words it is completely interrupted. I mean that a complete cessation of any respiratory action is achieved.

This state is experienced after years of *Kriya* practice. It has nothing to do with forcibly holding your breath. We are talking about the state in which the breath is completely absent, with the consequent dissolution of the mind.

Many *kriyabans* are unable to conceive of such a state. There is an aura of mystery surrounding his description; people think it is impossible and that any claims about its occurrence are false. Nonetheless, it is possible to experience this state. When it occurs, a *kriyaban* does not feel the need to breathe in; or he takes a short inhalation and does not feel the need to exhale for a very long time. (For longer than science judges possible.)

Those who experience this state realize, with genuine sincerity, that they are not breathing at all; realizes that fresh energy supports the body from within, without the need for oxygen. I is explained that this state is the result of having entered the channel of *Sushumna*.

For the present moment, the practice we have described in the first three stages is a real gem, it represents the quintessence of beauty; with it, time flies without noticing and what might seem like an exhausting task turns out to be as easy as a moment of rest. Now just focus on this way of practicing.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 6

Two very useful procedures for those who have difficulty to practice Kriya Pranayama for the first time

Those who undertake the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* may find it difficult to put into practice the instructions that have just been described. I recommend two practices to them to familiarize with for a few weeks. In my opinion these techniques are within the reach of any spiritual seeker.

Nadi Sodhana

Before starting the exercise, it is important to clean the nostrils so that the breath can flow freely. This can be done using water, inhaling eucalyptus essence and blowing your nose. If one of the nostrils is always blocked, this is a medical problem that must be taken into due consideration. If the obstruction is caused by a serious cold, no *Pranayama* exercises should be practiced.

The mouth must be closed. Focus on the *Muladhara Chakra*. Close the right nostril with your right thumb and inhale through the left nostril slowly, evenly and deeply for 6-10 seconds. Visualize that you are attracting the energy contained in the inhaled air and lifting it along the left side of the spine. Close both nostrils and hold your breath for 3-6 seconds.

During this hold, contract the muscles at the base of the spine. This contraction is called *Mula Bandha*. Open your right nostril and exhale through it, always in the same slow, uniform and deep rhythm.

Keeping the left nostril closed, inhale through the right nostril. Visualize that you are attracting the energy contained in the inhaled air and lifting it along the right side of the spine. Close both nostrils and hold your breath for 3-6 seconds. During this hold, practice the *Mula Bandha* contraction that we explained earlier. Close the right nostril and exhale through the left nostril slowly, evenly and deeply for 6-10 seconds.

This is a cycle. Six cycles are enough. The fingers can be used in different ways to open and close the nostrils, everyone does as he pleases.

Ujjayi Pranayama

This exercise is very useful for forming an idea of what happens in *Kriya Pranayama*.

Begin by breathing deeply in and out through the nostrils, making a sound/noise in the throat. Just focus on that sound. After a few breaths, the duration of each breath stretches effortlessly. Continue until you notice two sensations: cool on inhalation, warmth on exhalation. Enjoy these comfortable sensations while remaining immobile and impassive. It is obvious that you are not practicing the classical technique of *Kriya Pranayama*. You are not guiding the energy up on the inhale and down on the exhale. Furthermore, you are not trying to perceive the location of each *Chakra*.

Now perceive the point between the eyebrows (*Kutastha*) as a cave where you are sitting with the firm intention of remaining still and enjoying the good feeling that this way of breathing produces.

Do not impose a precise rhythm on the two phases of the breath.

Both of these phases take place not on the basis of a rhythm but when the urge to breathe naturally arises. If you don't follow this instruction, the effects will be minimal.

Gradually discover how the exhalation reveals inherent power. That is, you realize that each exhalation is accompanied by a certain energy that is created in your lungs and torso. The more you observe this, the deeper the awareness of this energy becomes. All of this happens spontaneously, you don't have to force yourself to intensify any sensation.

At some point, in an extremely natural way, you will have reached the simplest way of practicing *Kriya Pranayama*. The wonderful fact is that this *Pranayama* leads you into a state of great inner absorption!

Explanation of the verse of the Bhagavad Gita quoted in chapter 2

"By offering the inhaling breath in the exhaling breath, and the exhaling breath in the inhaling breath, the yogi neutralizes both of these breaths thus releasing the energy from the heart and bringing it under control."
[*Bhagavad Gita* IV 29]

During the inhalation ("*inhaling breath*") you experience a form of energy that enters the body along with the air through the nose, descending into the pharynx, larynx, trachea, lungs ... But you also experience another form of energy (*Apana*) which is rising from the base of the spine, moves within the spine, reaching the high *Chakras*. These two movements of energy occur simultaneously.

During the exhalation ("*exhaling breath*") the stale/consumed air leaves the body. During this fact a subtle energy (*Prana*) moves downward from *Medulla* to *Muladhara*, piercing each *Chakra*.

Ultimately, during *Kriya Pranayama* two opposite forms of energy *Apana* and *Prana* continuously approach each other. In normal life *Apana* current moves downwards while *Prana* moves upwards. Instead in *Kriya Pranayama* they are made to move in the opposite direction to what is natural to them. This fact is repeated many times until *Prana* and *Apana* succeed to merge together and become stable in the region of the girdle (navel). After many inhalations and exhalations these two forms of energy know the state that *Lahiri Mahasaya* called "*Tranquility*".

CHAPTER 7

LAHIRI MAHASAYA'S KRIYA YOGA – SECOND PART (Completion of First Kriya)

The practice described in the previous chapter is the central technique of the path of *Kriya Yoga*. Its value is inestimable: there is no other similar procedure in beauty and effectiveness. Now, adding a few more technical instructions contains within itself a slight chance of disturbing this idyll. But the traditional *First Kriya* teaching involves using three other procedures.

There is *Maha Mudra* which is the best preparation for the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* and there is also *Navi Kriya* and *Yoni Mudra* that are usually practiced after it. To these techniques we will also add the practice of *mental Pranayama* and explain what *Kechari Mudra* consists of.

Study each part of this chapter with great patience and try to practice these instructions. Don't worry, you will find that these techniques are also very enjoyable and useful.

MAHA MUDRA

Use a carpet placed on the floor to practice the following procedure. Bend the left leg under the body so that the left heel is as close to the perineum as possible; the right leg is extended forward. Inhale deeply, feel the energy rising in the head along the spine.

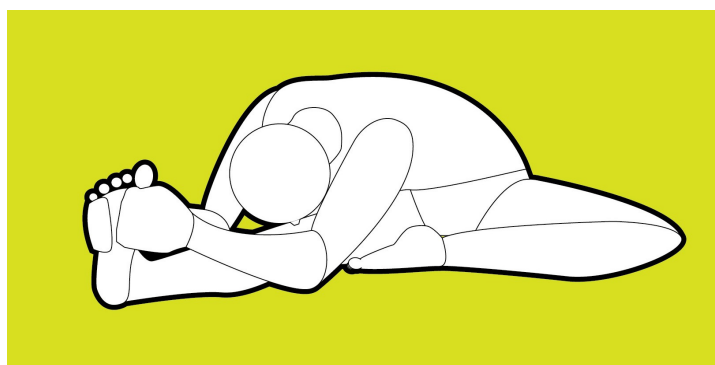


Fig.2 Maha Mudra

Hold your breath, lean forward (very relaxed) so that you can grab your right toes with both hands, gently pull them back a little. In this fully extended position, the chin is naturally pressed to the chest. Keep holding your breath and mentally chant *Om* in the point between the eyebrows 6 times.

You can contract the anal and abdominal muscles and draw the abdominal muscles slightly inward so that the navel moves towards the lumbar center. Still holding the breath, return to the starting position and with a long exhalation, visualize the warm energy that descends along the spine to *Muladhara Chakra*.

Repeat the procedure with the role of the legs reversed and finally repeat the procedure keeping both legs extended. This is one *Maha Mudra*; takes about 60-80 seconds. *Maha Mudra* is practiced three times.

Variant of Maha Mudra

As you stretch forward, you can relax your breath and you can choose to repeat the *Mantra Om* 12 times not in *Kutastha* but in *Muladhara Chakra*.

Note 1

This *Mudra* must succeed easily, one must not get hurt! At first, many *kriyabans* cannot keep their leg straight without risking hurting their back or knee. To avoid this, you can let the extended leg be a little bent at the knee so that the position is comfortable!

Note 2

The most serious *Kriya* schools recommend that for every 12 *Kriya Pranayama*, one *Maha Mudra* is performed – it being understood that three is the minimum number. (Just to understand, those who practice 60 *Kriya Pranayama* should practice *Maha Mudra* five times, while those who practice 12 or 24 should practice three.) Unfortunately, having listened to various *kriyabans*, I can say that it is a miracle to find one that practices the three repetitions expected. There are people who delude themselves that they are practicing *Kriya* correctly without ever practicing even one single *Maha Mudra*! It is clear that by permanently depriving oneself of it and living a sedentary life, the spine becomes less elastic. As the years go by, conditions worsen and it becomes almost impossible to maintain the correct meditation posture for more than a few minutes – this is why *Maha Mudra* is so important for a *kriyaban*.

Effects

Maha Mudra contains all three *Bandhas*. Applied simultaneously with the body bent forward, without using excessive contraction, they help to be aware of both ends of the *Sushumna* and produce the sensation of an energetic current moving up in the spine. In time it is possible to perceive the whole *Sushumna* as a radiant channel. There are accounts of *yogis* who have achieved fantastic experiences using this technique alone. According to what they say, the perception of *Sushumna* has increased enormously. There are *kriyabans* who have set aside all the other *Kriyas* and are practicing 144 *Maha Mudra* a day divided into two sessions. They consider

Maha Mudra to be the most useful technique in all of *Kriya Yoga*.

Details of little importance

I have noticed that some schools insist on irrelevant details. For example, they insist that when extending the right leg forward, one should bend the left leg under the body so that the left heel is as close to the perineum as possible. It is explained that the left heel is able to exert pressure on the perineum. This pressure stimulates awareness of the *Muladhara Chakra* in the coccyx region at the base of the spine. [Of course, when extending the left leg, the right leg creates pressure.]

Another example is when some schools teach to bring the knee of the leg that is about to be stretched (or both knees, before the third movement) closer to the body so that the upper leg is as close to the chest as possible. The hands, with intertwined fingers, are placed around the knee and put pressure on it. They say this helps keep the back straight and causes the inner sound of the *Anahata Chakra* to become audible.

NAVI KRIYA

For many people this technique is boring, they don't see the use of it and they skip it. In fact it is not a strictly necessary practice when one begins to practice *Kriya Pranayama*. It will become more and more important when trying to make the breath subtle before tackling the *Higher Kriyas*.

Navi Kriya

Forget the breath, let it be natural. Lower the chin to the hollow of the throat. *Om* is chanted 100 times – either with the voice, or mentally – in the navel area. The chin is then raised as far as possible and *Om* is chanted about 25 times in the third *Manipura Chakra*. This is one *Navi Kriya*. Practice four *Navi Kriyas*.

In this exercise, if desired, the hands can also be involved. With the fingers interlocked, palms down and the tips of the thumbs touching, the thumbs lightly press the navel along with each *Om* chant. Then when the chin is raised, the fingers are intertwined behind with the palms facing upwards. For each *Om*, the thumbs apply light pressure on the lumbar vertebrae.

Note

Some schools recommend practicing a few *Kapalabhati* breaths before *Navi Kriya*. This serves to make the effect of *Navi Kriya* more intense. The *Kapalabhati* breath is explained in the appendix n.6. It is found towards the end of the book, before the glossary.

Variant of Navi Kriya

Visualize a thin channel coming out of the point between the eyebrows curves and goes down into the navel.

It involves chanting the *Mantra Om* alternately between the point between the eyebrows and the navel. Precisely, when it comes natural to take an inhalation, inhale, rise with the consciousness along the visualized channel, from the navel to the point between the eyebrows, pause for a moment and chant *Om* mentally. When it is natural for you to exhale, exhale, go down with the consciousness along the visualized channel to the navel, pause for a moment and chant *Om* mentally. By repeating this, you will feel very strongly that the breath calms down and tends to disappear.

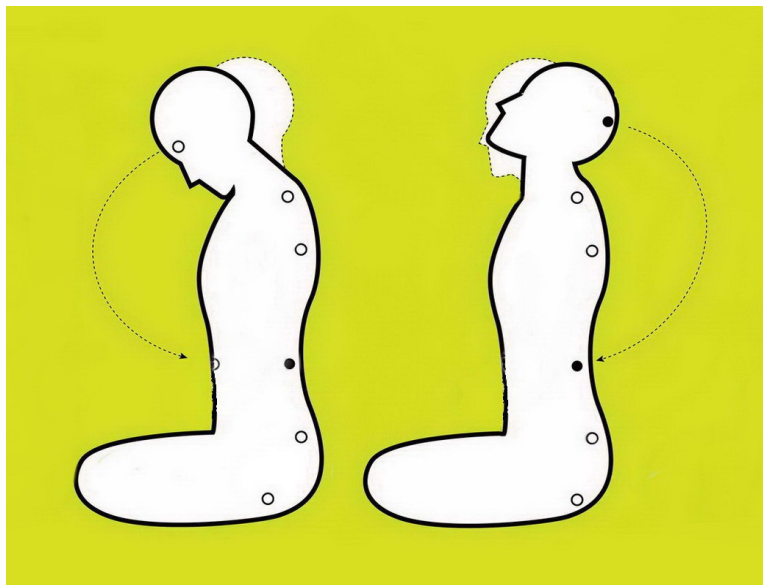


Fig.3 Simple form of Navi Kriya

When *Om* is chanted about 100 times, lift your chin. Visualize another subtle channel that connects (externally to the body) the *Bindu* with the third *Chakra*. Let your breath flow freely up and down that channel. When *Om* is chanted about 25 times in all, return to your normal chin position. This is one *Navi Kriya*. Repeat this exercise four times.

Note

In the appendices 2 and 3 contained in the fourth part of this book you will find further insights into this particular technique which is very important but little loved by *kriyabans*.

YONI MUDRA

This technique is only practiced in the deep stillness of the night, when silence is all around and one is totally and perfectly relaxed. *Yoni Mudra* generates such a concentration of energy at the point between the eyebrows that the quality of sleep following changes for the better. In other words, after passing through the layers of the subconscious, awareness can reach the so-called state of "Super-consciousness."

After a deep *Kriya* inhalation, having guided the energy in the central part of the head, close the ears with the thumbs, the eyelids with the index fingers, the nostrils with the middle fingers, the lips with the ring and little fingers. Hold your breath while mentally repeating *Om* several times and observe any light in the point between the eyebrows. Hold your breath as long as this is comfortable. The elbows are parallel to the ground and point outward. Don't let them go down with fatigue, support them in some way if necessary.

During this action aimed at perceiving the light, the index fingers must not press on the eyes – this would be harmful and of no use! You can pull the lids down with your index fingers and press on the top of the cheekbones at the corners of the eyes. When you feel the need, exhale, moving awareness down the spine. This is *Yoni Mudra* which is normally performed only once.

After *Yoni Mudra*, stay focused as long as possible at the point between the eyebrows trying to perceive the light of *Kutastha*.

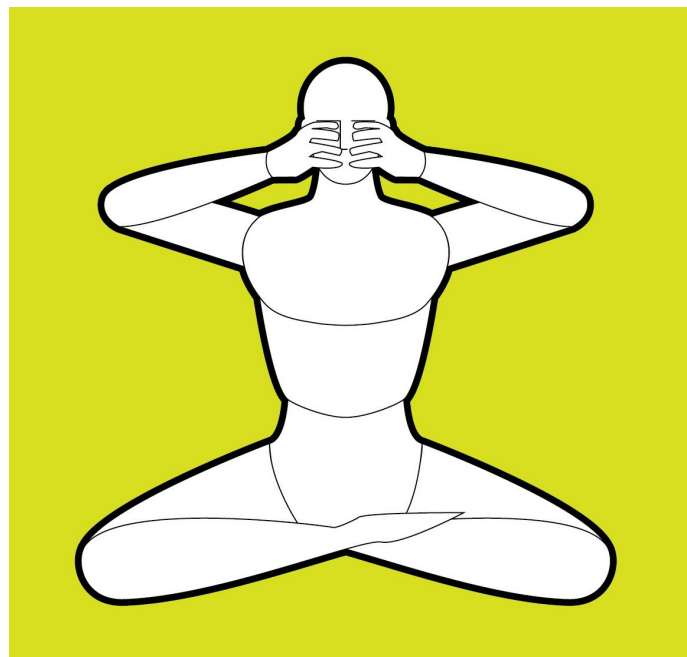


Fig.4 Yoni Mudra

Some important schools give the following instruction: increase the number of *Om* repetitions by one a day (while you are holding your breath), up to a maximum of 200. You should never force it. But how is it possible to achieve these results without forcing? We realize that satisfying this request is of enormous difficulty. I believe that this undertaking can only be seriously approached after dealing with the *Thokar* procedure. For the moment, for those who at least want to start this journey, I share a

simple remedy that can lessen the discomfort of a long *Kumbhaka*.

At the end of a moderate inhalation (not the typical *Kriya Pranayama*, but a very short one), firmly close all the openings of the head except the nostrils, let out a small amount of air, then immediately close the nostrils. Relax the chest muscles as if you want to start a new inhalation: this gives the sensation that the breath has become calm in the area from the throat to the point between the eyebrows. In this situation, the concentration on the point between the eyebrows and the *Om* repetition can be carried on long enough.

MENTAL PRANAYAMA

Once the *Kriya Yoga* techniques are completed, the moment of pure "Meditation" occurs.

There are several definitions of "Meditation": some consider it a mental procedure or being absorbed in a particular ecstatic state (mystical rapture.) Some simply recommend enjoying the effects of *Kriya Pranayama* without adding further clarification. In the previous chapter I advised you to remain motionless for at least 10 minutes while remaining conscious of your breath that goes on naturally with its rhythm or visualizing it as an energy that rises and falls along the spine.

We now explain that the last part of the routine is the best time to move towards the breathless state using a particular concentration on the *Chakras*. We define this action: *Mental Pranayama*.

The *Chakras* can be compared to psycho-physical "knots" that can be untied if "touched" with our concentration. When we become able to untie these knots we will feel as vast and free as heaven and we will melt into pure joy. A *Kriya* routine that does not end with the enjoyment of such sweetness is like when a musical group that has gone on stage, has prepared all the instruments, has tuned them and then abandons everything without playing!

We then explain how to practice *Mental Pranayama*. After three deep breaths, let your breath move naturally and forget about it. Move your awareness up and down the spine, stopping in each *Chakra* for 10-15 seconds. Dwell on the first, move on to the second, dwell on it ... and so on. After the ascent to the *Medulla*, the descent begins: fifth *Chakra*, fourth *Chakra* and so on ... One complete round takes 2-3 minutes. Enjoy a few rounds by increasing the state of inner calm.

Try to grasp the sweetness that emanates from each *Chakra*. Do not make any particular effort such as exerting mental or physical pressure on each *Chakra*, simply relax and enjoy a sweetness that occurs naturally. Do not complicate this experience by adding various details that could prove useful in other techniques but not in this one – for example contracting the muscles near each *Chakra*, using intense visualizations and *bija Mantras* ...

You would risk all the sweetness being dispersed. Even chanting *Om* mentally in each *Chakra* could, at this moment, be disturbing.

Maintain awareness on each *Chakra* until you feel a sensation of sweetness, as if the *Chakra* was "melting". What this means will be revealed to you by the practice itself.

So remember: *Mental Pranayama* must be carried on until a beautiful and "sweet" sensation occurs. One day, continuing on the *Kriya* path, you will find that this *mental Pranayama* will eventually become the supreme form of *Kriya Pranayama*, what *Lahiri Mahasaya* called *Uttam Pranayama* (Excellent Pranayama.)

Various ways of conceiving a Kriya routine

How can a good *Kriya* routine be conceived? There are various possibilities. I bring here only three examples.

Example 1 (the most rational way): Maha Mudra - K. Pranayama - Navi Kriya - Mental Pranayama - Yoni Mudra at night

Example 2: Maha Mudra - K. Pranayama - Mental Pranayama - Navi Kriya - Yoni Mudra at night

Example 3: K. Pranayama (12 only) - Maha Mudra - Navi Kriya - complete the chosen number of K. Pranayama - Mental Pranayama - Yoni Mudra at night

The second example is explained on the possibility of using *Navi Kriya* to intensify the effect of *mental Pranayama*. The third example is based on the principle of starting with a short practice of *Kriya Pranayama* and then using the techniques *Maha Mudra* and *Navi Kriya* as a preparation to discover the possibility of practicing *Kriya Pranayama* in an extremely more intense way that at the end it continues with the sweetness of *mental Pranayama*.

KECHARI MUDRA

The ancient *yogis* discovered the importance of connecting the tip of the tongue with the seat of calm *Prana* in the brain. Usually the tongue rarely is able to touch the uvula and almost never gets in the nasal pharynx. It is explained that this hinders the human being from connecting with the great reservoir of energy existing in the *Sahasrara* region.

The practice of *Kriya Pranayama* with *Kechari Mudra* is an enchanting experience, one of the best moments in the life of a *kriyaban*. However, a beginner keeps the tongue in the "*baby Kechari*" position. That is, with the tip of the tongue touches the upper palate at the point where the hard palate becomes soft. This simple fact makes the mind very quiet.

Kechari Mudra means inserting the tongue into the nasal pharynx

cavity. *Kriya Pranayama* should be practiced with the tongue in this position. I say "should" because not everyone can practice in this way. We will now illustrate a method (*Talabya Kriya*) for obtaining *Kechari Mudra*.

- ***Talabya Kriya***

The tongue is relaxed, the tip touches the inner side of the upper arch of the teeth. Well, starting from this position, press the entire body of the tongue against the upper palate to create a suction effect.

DON'T TURN THE TONGUE BACKWARD!



Fig.5 Key part of *Talabya Kriya*

When you've created the sucker effect, lower your lower jaw (obviously opening your mouth) distinctly feeling the stretch of the *frenulum* (the frenulum is the tissue that joins the tongue to the base of the mouth). Release your tongue with a snap, then push it out of your mouth so that it points towards your chin. In the beginning, do not exceed 10 repetitions a day in order not to strain too much or produce a wound to the *frenulum*. You can, after some days, reach 50 reps in about two minutes (110-120 seconds.)

Unfortunately, some do not immediately understand how to make the tongue adhere to the palate like a sucker before opening the mouth and stretching the *frenulum*. Sometimes, even if shown to them in person, they are unable to do it correctly.

Many practice *Talabya Kriya* mistakenly by instinctively turning the tongue back. The main mistake is to focus too much on where to put the tip of the tongue. The suction effect is obtained with the entire body of the tongue: the tip of the tongue must be relaxed.

Note

The *Talabya Kriya* technique can be enriched by massaging both the muscles of the tongue and the frenulum with one's fingers. *Lahiri Mahasaya* was absolutely opposed to cutting the frenulum for faster and easier results. In *Hatha Yoga* texts there are other tips for stretching the frenulum. A well known one is to wrap a piece of cloth around the tongue and with the help of your hands, gently pull (relaxing and repeating several times) the cloth both horizontally and up, towards the tip of the nose.

I hope it is clear that *Talabya Kriya* and *Kechari Mudra* are two completely different practices! If you open your mouth in front of a mirror during the first part of *Talabya Kriya* you will be able to see the concave parts that form on each side of the frenulum – it appears isolated from the body of the tongue. Instead when you practice *Kechari Mudra*, it is the uvula that comes forward and only the root of the tongue is visible!

Talabya Kriya is a technique that, in addition to serving the achievement of *Kechari Mudra*, creates a perceptible relaxing effect on the process of thinking. Therefore *Talabya Kriya* should not be considered a simple exercise to stretch (lengthen) the frenulum of the tongue. When the tongue sticks to the palate and the mouth is open, in that instant the energetic fracture between our body and the reserve of static *Prana* located in the upper part of the head is momentarily healed. This fact easily leads you into the meditative state. Even after mastering *Kechari Mudra*, *Talabya Kriya* should never be put aside as it creates a distinct calming effect on the thought forming process. It is not easy to justify why, by acting on the frenulum, it is possible to calm the process of forming useless thoughts. The fact is that anyone can observe this effect.

Strange to say, *Talabya Kriya* does not require concentration on anything specific, it is just a pure physical action. Just as a simple attempt to justify this, we can point out how the simple pressure of the tongue against the upper palate, maintaining the suction effect on the palate for 10-15 seconds, can, in and of itself, generate particular sensitivity in the area of the *Medulla*, and this happens in a short time. The detail of extending the tongue also plays an important role. When the tongue is fully extended, it pulls in some cranial bones and guides the decompression of the whole area.

● ***What happens after a few months of practicing Talabya Kriya***

After several months of practicing *Talabya Kriya* daily, it is right to try to check how close we are to *Kechari Mudra*. We then check if the tip of the tongue can touch the uvula, using the fingers to push the base of the tongue inwards. If the tip of the tongue touches the uvula, then for a few minutes a

day, try to push the base of the tongue more inward until the tip is able to pass the uvula (i.e. go beyond it) and perhaps even touch the pharynx behind it.

One day the tip of the tongue will enter the nasal pharynx for a short distance. Probably, as soon as the fingers pressing on the base of the tongue are removed, it will immediately slide out. But, after more days of exercise, the tongue will remain as if "trapped" in that position.

This is a turning point. The soft palate (the part from which the uvula hangs) acts as an elastic band preventing the tongue from sliding out.

Striving every day to practice at least 6-12 *Kriya Pranayama* with the tongue in this position – although there are drawbacks such as increased salivation and therefore occasionally having to swallow – the practice becomes easy and comfortable.



Fig.6 Position of the tongue when you enter the nasal-pharynx

After about three weeks of practicing this way, you should be able to reach the same position without using your fingers. The tongue will be able to enter the nasopharyngeal cavity by itself. There will always be room in this cavity to inhale and exhale through the nose.

Kriya literature states that the tongue can also be pushed higher. As any anatomy atlas can show, the tongue, when it fills the nasal pharynx, cannot extend further. That statement should therefore be understood as a hint to what a normal person *thinks* is happening. Indeed, by extending the tongue to its maximum limit, it is possible to experience a great force of attraction towards the point between the eyebrows, together with the sensation of having reached a higher position with the tip of the tongue.

Note on the need for Kechari Mudra to practice Higher Kriyas

The reference literature on *Kriya* states that reaching *Kechari Mudra* is crucial for being initiated into the *Higher Kriyas*. It is not uncommon for a *Kriya* teacher to ask to see the actual execution of the *Kechari* by inviting them to open their mouths in front of them and checking that the tongue disappears into the nasal cavity.

However great the effect of *Kechari Mudra* is, I firmly believe that it is important but not indispensable. The statement I have often heard – "Until one is established in *Kechari Mudra*, one cannot attain the state of Eternal Tranquility" – is FALSE!

It is inconceivable that the attainment of *Kechari* creates a clear division between people. Relegated to a lower class would remain those poor people who will never have the *higher Kriyas* just because they cannot achieve something physical that does not depend on their effort but only on their constitution. They will never be able to accelerate their spiritual path like those *kriyabans* that nature has endowed with a longer frenulum or a nasal pharynx more accessible at the tip of the tongue this idea is absurd!

PY's decision to grant *Higher Kriyas* initiation to those unable to practice *Kechari Mudra* has my full approval. Considering then the attitude of *Lahiri Mahasaya* to take part in human suffering, I believe that he too has behaved similarly.

● ***First effects of Kechari Mudra***

During the first three weeks of using *Kechari Mudra* proceed very carefully as you may experience a sense of "daze" where the mental faculties seem to be dull. Be prepared for this and consider refraining from driving and any work that involves a significant percentage of risk during these days.

When you become stable in this Mudra, you will notice three main effects:
[1] During the *Kriya* routine, often the breath appears almost stopped [2] Spontaneously the gaze is fixed on infinity without looking at anything in particular [3] The mind is quiet without useless thoughts.

The chatter of the mind ceases; silence and transparency become the hallmark of your state of consciousness. The mind works more soberly and enjoys an indispensable rest; each thought becomes more concrete and precise.

After a few months of constant practice, the tip of the tongue will be able to touch the confluence point of the nasal passage within the cavity of the palate. The soft tissue above the nasal holes on the inside of the nostrils is described in the *Kriya* literature as a "uvula over the uvula". The tip of the tongue touches this small area and remains "attached" to it comfortably.

Modesty is always welcome, but when this is achieved, a positive euphoria is so great (as if one has found Aladdin's magic lamp) that it cannot be held back. If we want to think of a perfect *Kriya Pranayama*, what we have described corresponds to this ideal of perfection.

As for the problems of practical life, you will learn to use the intuition born of meditation to deal with any difficulties that may arise. Within the perfect transparency of an interior order, all problems allow themselves to be resolved.

I believe that one "is born" to *Kriya* (understands the greatness of what he is doing) when he perceives the effects of this sweet practice: his beauty overflows and floods life.

"... it's hard to stay mad, when there's so much beauty in the world. Sometimes I feel like I'm seeing it all at once, and it's too much, my heart fills up like a balloon that's about to burst... And then I remember to relax, and stop trying to hold on to it, and then it flows through me like rain and I can't feel anything but gratitude for every single moment of my stupid little life. (From the movie *American Beauty*; 1999) "

Final note: the reason for practicing the Higher Kriyas

Kriya Yoga is a four-step spiritual path that prepares the seeker to encounter spiritual reality. Its stages are defined as follows:

1. Lift the tongue
2. Pierce the dorsal center knot
3. Pierce the navel knot
4. Pierce the knot in the coccyx center

The main characteristic of *Kriya Yoga* is that these knots dissolve from top to bottom, that is, respecting the order just indicated.

From the moment of our conception, *Kundalini* began a slow descent journey starting from the cells that form our brain, Medulla and then into the cells of the spine as it was forming. In this same order the knots are untied.

Of course, it's not just about removing obstacles. There are so many subtle processes that must take place during these four stages. The *Prana* of the whole body must be pacified, the contact with *Omkar* reality must be created and deepened indefinitely. This leads to the experience, which occurs when the time is ripe, of the state of calm breathing and ultimately the absence of breath. It is good to keep this in mind now that we are going to describe what it means to untie the four knots.

Lahiri Mahasaya explained that the whole spiritual path that leads to

the final realization can be walked only with the techniques of *First Kriya*.

What is perfectly understandable is that this practice is perfected over time, both with the help of the *Guru*, when this encounter can take place, and with the guidance of the intuition born of the same practice.

We have already seen how much help can come from practicing *Kechari Mudra*. Well *Lahiri* discovered the help that could also come from another practice: that of *Thokar*. He then saw how some of his disciples were able to practice this *Thokar* in an extremely intense way. To distinguish these two practices, the two terms were coined: *Second* and *Third Kriya*.

Later he understood how a further practice could be conceived that would strongly act on dissolving the last obstacle that makes it difficult for the *kriyaban* to enter the subtle channel of *Sushumna*. Then a *Fourth Kriya* was conceived which could be considered both the fact of undoing the knot of *Muladhara* and that of entering *Kutastha*, discovering that the two events are the same reality.

We now come to describe these four knots:

Tongue Knot (Jihvah – or Jihva – Granthi)

The knot of the tongue consists in the physiological fact that our tongue cannot normally touch the uvula or enter the nasal pharynx. For this reason we are disconnected from the energy reserve which is based in the *Sahasrara* region. It should be explained that loosening the tongue knot is achieved partially by turning the tongue back and touching the middle part of the upper palate at the point where the hard palate becomes soft.

When with *Kechari Mudra* we manage to access this inexhaustible inner source, many subtle transformations take place in our psycho-physical system: the most important of all is the quieting of all unwelcome and useless thoughts continually produced by our mind.

Heart knot (Hridaya Granthi)

After attaining *Kechari Mudra*, the journey of calm *Prana* from *Sahasrara* to *Muladhara* has begun. The obstacle that is now being overcome is *Hridaya Granthi* (the knot of the heart.) This knot is also called *Vishnu Granthi*: Lord *Vishnu* is the deity of conservation. This knot creates the desire to preserve ancient knowledge, traditions, institutions ... It produces "compassion", an acute desire to help suffering humanity. By untying this knot, we gain liberation from those traditional, powerful but illusory, bonds that are deeply rooted in our genetic code.

In the *Kriya* tradition this knot is dissolved by perfecting the *Thokar* procedure. A *kriyaban* becomes one with the element "air" (the fourth of the five *Tattwas*) whose seat is the fourth *Chakra*. Getting in tune with the

Tattwa of the air means entering a sublime state: the awareness of the Sound and the Divine Light are enormously intensified.

Navel knot (Nabhi Granthi)

The navel knot is untied by perfecting the procedure of *Navi Kriya* or by applying the Tibetan practice of *Tummo*. The *Prana* and *Apana* currents unite in the navel region and activate the balancing current *Samana*. The breath becomes calm and the consciousness tunes into the spiritual channel of *Sushumna* in the central part of the spine.

Muladhara Knot (Muladhara Granthi)

This knot is also called *Brahma Granthi*: it maintains ignorance of our infinite nature and is the greatest obstacle in the spiritual quest, as it obstructs the path of *Kundalini* which would like to move freely within the spine. Until one unties this knot, one cannot meditate effectively. The world of names and forms creates restlessness and prevents the mind from becoming one-pointed. Ambitions and desires trap the mind.

In *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya Yoga* this knot is untied either slowly through *Kriya Pranayama* or faster with the *Fourth Kriya* technique described in chapter 8 or with the *Tribhangamurari* Macro and Micro techniques described in chapter 9.

By untying the *Brahma Granti* knot, the screen of illusion is broken and *Kundalini* is then free to rise in all its power and reach *Kutastha*. Time-bound awareness dissolves – the yogi settles in the supreme *Atman* whose seat is in the *Sahasrara Chakra*. Total liberation is achieved.

Conclusion

Higher Kriyas are practiced when there is time to practice them and when the experience of several months or years of *Kriya Pranayama* has made the breath calmer and the mind freer from distractions. The aim is to arrive more quickly at the state in which, having the mind under control, our conscience can totally immerse itself in the spiritual dimension.

CHAPTER 8

LAHIRI MAHASAYA'S KRIYA YOGA (Higher Kriyas as explained by the most part of the schools)

There are many variants of the *Higher Kriyas*; we will try to approach the tradition handed down by *Panchanan Bhattacharya*, direct disciple of *Lahiri Mahasaya*.

These *Kriyas* are divided into two groups: the first group (which we will talk about in this chapter) requires the ability to hold the breath for a long period of time. This skill develops gradually and always with great caution.

In the next ninth chapter we will deal with the remaining group in which it is required to have reached the state of "calm breath". What is this state? Briefly, this breath is manifested when the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* succeeds with a long but extremely subtle breath, almost non-existent, while continuing to perceive clearly the ascending and descending current. There are no more sounds in the throat. The duration of such a breath approaches 44 seconds. I realize that it is difficult to put into words what the "calm breath" state is. I think that only the person who experiences it in his own practice understands this.

In this chapter the following techniques will be described: *Omkar*, *Thokar*, *Advanced Thokar* and *Pratichakra Omkar Kriya* [*Pratichakra* means *Chakra* for *Chakra*.] We attribute the name *Second Kriya* to *Thokar*, while to the form of *Advanced Thokar* we attribute the name *Third Kriya* and finally to *Pratichakra Omkar Kriya* we attribute the name of *Fourth Kriya*: these are the names that most of the schools that refer to *Panchanan Bhattacharya* use. In my research I did not clearly understand the name to be attributed to the simple *Omkar* technique. I thought to simply call it "*Omkar Technique* - preliminary to *Thokar*" as for all intents and purposes this is precisely its function.

Omkar technique - preliminary to Thokar

Tradition explains that this practice takes place in the best way by employing *Kechari Mudra*. The reason is that with the help of this technique which turns the tongue in, the mind is also turned in.

The *Omkar* procedure essentially consists of a *Pranayama* whose basis is the 12-syllable *Vasudeva Mantra*: "*Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya*".⁴ By means of this *Mantra* the *Prana* and the mind are

⁴ I received it changing the first "v" in "b": "*Om Namō Bhagabate Vasudevaya*" and in

allowed to "touch" the *Chakras* in a very intense way. The syllables of this *Mantra* are mentally placed in the center of each *Chakra*.

Practical instruction

We have seen that *First Kriya* requires a strong and long breath. On the contrary, in the *Omkar Technique* the absolute necessity of a more subtle way of breathing is emphasized, otherwise the *Prana* will remain unevenly distributed along the spine. If the practice were to be done with too much force, the *Prana* could not calm down and this would create an insurmountable difficulty.

Inhale, in the subtle way we have described, mentally placing the syllables of the *Vasudeva Mantra* in the seat of each *Chakra*, pausing for a few moments in each. During the inhalation lift the chin following the inner movement of the *Prana*; *Om* is mentally chanted in the first *Chakra*, *Na* in the second, *Mo* in the third, *Bha* in the fourth, *Ga* in the fifth and *Ba* in the *Medulla*. In this way, in each *Chakra*, the breath creates pressure – effective without being too strong. The practice is optimal when one feels that the breath/*Mantra* is like a scalpel which slightly penetrates each *Chakra*.

Once the inhalation is complete, place yourself totally in *Kutastha*, hold your breath and gently come down a little with your chin. This is not *Jalandhara Bandha* – it is milder. While you're doing this, gently push the tip of your tongue up. You will have the sensation that it touches the third eye. This happens especially if you are practicing true *Kechari Mudra*, i.e. if the tongue is above the uvula. Also feel that the fourth *Chakra* and the third eye are becoming one.

Having this perception, and continuing to hold your breath, rotate your head counterclockwise. Starting from the chin-down position, move to the left, then go back and then to the right and then return to the head position we described earlier. It is as if, as the rotation proceeds, the head fills with energy. During the rotation of the head, perceive the effect it also has on the heart *Chakra*.

Now the exhalation begins. Place the remaining syllables of the *Mantra* into each *Chakra* from top to bottom. *Te* is mentally chanted in the *Medulla*, *Va* in the fifth *Chakra*, *Su* in the fourth, *De* in the third, *Va* in the second and *Ya* in the first. Repeat at least 12 cycles of this procedure.

Effects of this practice

As you delve deeper into this practice, you will intuit how to go deeper and deeper through it.

Mind and *Prana* become stable not only in *Ajna Chakra* and in *Muladhara*, as happens in *First Kriya*, but also in each *Chakra*. Thus there

this way I utilize it in my descriptions.

is a greater chance of attaining stability for *Prana*. When this skill is attained, one becomes able to still the breath along the entire spine.

The *Om* sound emerges naturally and captivates the mind. At first, the sound seems like bees gone mad, gradually refining into a note that sounds like a flute, harp, gong or thunder.

In the *Omkar* technique there is a stage where the sound reaches its state of maximum subtlety and here the practitioner is immersed in its stability and is overwhelmed by inexpressible bliss. In the phase following this practice, the state of tranquility appears in all its power.

To conclude, when you get good results you can decide to experiment the *Second Kriya* to experience all the unlimited spiritual grace contained in the heart *Chakra*.

Second Kriya: Thokar

The element "air" (the fourth of the 5 *tattwas*) resides in the heart *Chakra*. In the *Omkar* technique we have already learned to pay attention to this *Chakra*. Now, after the practice of 12 *Omkar Kriyas* the mind develops the ability to focus specifically on the "air" element that resides in the heart *Chakra*.

The structure of the *Second Kriya Pranayama* is somewhat similar to the previous breath technique but is intensified by a strong jerk that is applied in the seat of the fourth *Chakra*. This jerk is called *Thokar*.

With this *Second Kriya*, the knot of the heart (*Hridaya Granti*) is struck; with the practice of the advanced technique (*Third Kriya*), the knot of the heart is pierced.

The characteristic of the *Second Kriya* is that *Kumbhaka* is practiced in the fourth *Chakra*. The *Prana* is held here in this place.

The *kriyaban* places his mind in *Sushumna*, holds his breath and concentrates in *Kutastha*. Then, with the tongue in *Kechari Mudra*, with a jerk, moves the chin towards the chest and guides all its inner strength into the Lotus of the heart: the mind becomes as if dead and a state of Conscious Absorption takes place.

Thokar embodies the perfection of *Kriya Pranayama*. The ancient *Hatha Yoga* texts say that *Pranayama* without the three *Bandhas* (*Jalandhara*, *Mula* and *Uddiyana*) is useless. They also say that the *Bandhas* are useless without the *Maha Veda*. Well, all this is contained in *Thokar*.

Practical instruction

Moderately contract the muscles at the base of the spine. Inhale and simultaneously raise awareness along the spinal column. The hands with

intertwined fingers are placed above the navel to create mental pressure over the first three *Chakras*. This pressure is refined by adding *Uddiyana Bandha*. During the inhalation raise the chin following the inner movement of the *Prana*; mentally chant the syllables of the *Vasudeva Mantra* (*Om Namoh Bhagabate Vasudevaya*.) *Om* is chanted in the first *Chakra*, *Na* in the second, *Mo* in the third, *Bha* in the fourth, *Ga* in the fifth and *Ba* in *Medulla*.

Once this inhalation is complete, hold your breath, lower your head forward and touch your chest with your chin. From this position, move your head to the left while also turning your face to the left and lifting your chin until it is over your left shoulder and parallel to the ground.

Then keep rotating your head in the same counter-clockwise direction. When the head is centered between the shoulders and the chin is raised as much as possible (and the muscles behind the neck are contracted) chant **Te** in the heart *Chakra*.

Relax the contraction and continue the counter-clockwise rotation of the head until the right ear approaches the right shoulder, without turning the face to the right and then continue the circular motion until the chin is again in the center and touches the chest. Do not pause but continue the rotation by moving the head to the left, turning the face to the left and lifting the chin until it is above the left shoulder. At this point, contract the cervical muscles and chant **Va** in the heart *Chakra*.

Release the contraction, continue the rotation, but this time, right after, when you reach the center point between the shoulders (the chin is not held up as in the previous round) bend your head forward, bring your chin to your chest, and chant **Su** into the *Heart Chakra* and continue to hold your breath in this position for a few more seconds before lifting your head.

Apply *Mula Bandha* and *Uddiyana Bandha*: you will feel an intensification of energy in the heart region.

After this pause, lift your chin until it is horizontal again. At this point, breathe out quietly. Mentally chant **De** in *Manipura*, **Va** in *Swadhisthana*, and **Ya** in *Muladhara*. The duration of the exhalation should be longer than the duration of the inhalation. Repeat this powerful procedure 12 times.

Third Kriya: advanced form of Thokar

The *Kriya* that we will now describe is an enormous acceleration of the *Second Kriya* which unties, with greater force, the knot of the heart. Mastering this *Kriya* creates very subtle experiences; perception of "inner light" and "inner sound" become much easier. The mind and *Prana* need to be touched by the quintessence located in the place of the heart.

In this *Kriya* the use of a longer *Kumbhaka* than the one foreseen in the *Second Kriya* is prescribed: in fact the instruction is given to apply the procedure, which we have previously described, several times on the heart *Chakra* maintaining a perfect *Kumbhaka*. There are various ways of conceiving the way of holding the breath: here I describe the two most common.

First way of conceiving how to hold the breath

Start doing the same actions that have been described in the *Second Kriya*. Inhale and simultaneously lift your awareness up the spinal column. During the inhalation lift the chin following the inner movement of the *Prana*; Mentally chant the syllables of the *Vasudeva Mantra* as already explained. With this inhalation complete, hold your breath, tilt your head forward and touch your chin to your chest. Then move your head and face to the left, lifting your chin up over your left shoulder and mentally chant **Te** in the heart *Chakra*. Continue to rotate your head in the same anti-clockwise direction. When the head is centered between the shoulders chant **Va** in the heart *Chakra*. Having reached the central point between the shoulders tilt the head forward, bring the chin to the chest, and chant **Su** in the heart *Chakra*. Continue to hold your breath and repeat all these head movements 6-12 times while holding your breath. Finally lift your chin until it is horizontal again. At this point, exhale quietly. Mentally chant **De** in *Manipura*, **Va** in *Swadhisthana*, and **Ya** in *Muladhara*. Repeat this whole procedure 12 times.

By means of this form of *Thokar* the door of the *Sushumna* is revealed. Experiences of happiness, pain, peace etc. are perceived. If one is able to cut the knot here, most material and psychic slavery will be cut off and the path of *yoga* further cleared of obstacles.

Second, extremely challenging, way of conceiving how to hold the breath

Let us carefully consider this second possibility. It is taught to continue holding the breath even after 5 repetitions of the head movements: the instruction that *Lahiri Mahasaya* gave was to increase the number of these repetitions by one a day up to 200 repetitions of the movement! It is explained that in this way the small shell that hides the state of supreme tranquility is removed and the practitioner gets very close to the state of *Samadhi*, even being able to reach it.

It is imperative not to feel a state of discomfort! "Don't force" is the firm recommendation! This procedure is practiced only once after *Kriya Pranayama* and *Navi Kriya*.

Some reflections on the difficulty of increasing the repetitions of the head movements while maintaining perfect Kumbhaka

Let's try to ask ourselves: how is it possible to comfortably reach the goal of 200 rotations, without interrupting the state of *Kumbhaka*? Fulfilling this request appears very difficult – almost impossible, even though using movements reduced to the essentials. Most *kriyabans* find themselves stuck after 20-30 repetitions, panting to resume breathing. Is it correct to proceed by moving your head much faster? No, this would be silly.

Please consider a possible explanation for what happens to those people who claim to have achieved that goal.

I think that when one is approaching the limit of the ability to hold one's breath, keeping the chest expanded and the abdominal muscles and diaphragm contracted and immobile, it is possible for a small (almost imperceptible) sip of air to come out when the chin is lowered towards the chest and an imperceptible sip of air to enter when the chin is raised.

Note, I wrote "almost imperceptible"! Surely a person does not perform any specific act of inhaling or exhaling. The *kriyaban* is relaxed, unaware of this fact and lets this phenomenon happen automatically and naturally. It may happen that this *kriyaban* is convinced to proceed while maintaining perfect breath holding.

I believe that in this way the goal of 200 rotations can be achieved. Perhaps, thanks to the effects of this practice that we can consider "imperfect", by means of the effects on the nerve ganglia which exert an influence on the central cardio-respiratory mechanism, the practice could take place in ever better conditions. Are these conditions the state of perfect breathlessness? I cannot answer. Surely, the experience of the 200 rotations occurs in a state of consciousness characterized by an increased sense of freedom from physical laws.

I want to emphasize that *Kevala Kumbhaka* (automatic cessation of breath while remaining in a state of immobility) is a whole other reality, an integral part of the state of *Samadhi*. This *Kevala Kumbhaka* is fundamental in the *Kriya* path and can be obtained with the prolonged practice of *Kriya Pranayama* (*First Kriya*).

To conclude the explanation of this *Third Kriya*, I still want to underline a concept: to continue in one's spiritual evolution it is obligatory to listen to the *Omkar* sound. *Om, Aum, Omkar, Nada, Shabda, Pranava...* call it what you want: this experience must take place in the life of a *kriyaban*!

Fourth Kriya: Pratichakra Omkar Kriya

In the *Second* and *Third level of Kriya*, the *Prana* becomes stable in the heart. Now, through the *Fourth Kriya*, the uniformly stable state of *Prana* is reached in the totality of *Sushumna*. With the practice of the *Fourth Kriya*, the *Muladhara Granti* is pierced.

In the methodology of this *Kriya*, the ascending and descending movements of the mind and the *Prana*, and the practice of *Kumbhaka* play an important role. The characteristic of this method is that it leads to the manifold stability which has been only partially achieved up to now.

By raising the *Prana* in *Kutastha* by means of a deep inhalation a particular instruction to practice *Japa* at that point is given.

One holds one's breath and mentally chants the *Vasudeva Mantra* three times. The number of three times is for those who start this practice, later, as we will see, it will be increased.

This is done with each *Chakra* by focusing the *Prana* in each center. The six *Chakras* are perceived as six moons. It is explained that one should be able to hold *Prana* in *Kutastha*. If the *Prana* begins to descend very slowly and deeply below the throat it should be raised again in *Kutastha*.

With this excellent stability of mind, if 12 cycles of this procedure are performed, one goes beyond the realms of "stability" hitherto attained in *Dhyana*, and the "shell" is broken.

Practical instruction

Focus on the *Muladhara Chakra*. Contract the muscles that are near its physical location. Through a deep inhalation visualize the *Muladhara Chakra* rising to the point between the eyebrows, where you will perceive it as a full moon. Do not "touch" the other *Chakras*. They don't exist. Hold your breath and focus on the "inner space between the eyebrows". This will be easy with *Kechari Mudra*.⁵ On the screen between the eyebrows, a particular color experience takes place – this color is different for each *Chakra*. Mentally chant the *Vasudeva Mantra* (*Om Na Mo Bha Ga Ba Te Va Su De Va Ya*) three times, always holding your breath. Slowly place its syllables in the center of *Kutastha*.

By means of a long exhalation, ideally lower this *Chakra* from the point between the eyebrows to its true seat in the spine. Do the same thing with each *Chakra* of the spine. In a similar way attract *Medulla* towards *Kutastha*. Always remember to contract the muscles of the spine which are

⁵ "Ke-chari" is literally translated as "the state of those who fly in the sky, in the ether". A particular "space" is created in the region between the tip of the tongue and the point between the eyebrows and is perceived as a "vacuum", although it is not a physical void. By merging into this empty space, it is easier for a *kriyaban* to perceive the rhythms of each *Chakra* and distinguish them one from another.

located near the seat of the *Chakra* that you are gradually bringing into *Kutastha*. Then complete the "cycle" by acting again on the *Medulla* and then lifting the *Chakras* 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, always being aware of a particular experience of Light in *Kutastha*. In order to break the knot of *Muladhara* one must experience the different *Chakras* and dissolve the five *Tattwas*. The technique is complete if the whole procedure is repeated 12 times.

In the *Kriya* tradition, the *Chakras* are related to the five *Tattwas*: earth, water, fire, air, ether. ⁶ Offering each *Tattwa* individually to the light of the spiritual eye, gathering it and intensifying it in the region between the eyebrows is the highest action ever conceived to dissolve the last shell of illusion.

By means of the experience of the different *Chakras*, you will be able to break the knot of *Muladhara*. The sleeping *Kundalini* moves and rises upward. This is the mystery of how the *Muladhara* knot is broken.

Now we come to consider the delicate topic of increasing the number of repetitions of the *Vasudeva Mantra* in the center of *Kutastha* for each *Chakra*. The number of repetitions is gradually increased. One should reach thirty-six times for each *Chakra*, always holding the breath. This is what the tradition says.

Here we are in a situation similar to the one we encountered with the *Third Kriya*. At that moment if we chant this *Mantra* slowly, then this achievement becomes practically impossible, a real torture. I respect and write what tradition has handed down to us, nevertheless I continue to believe that the concept of "perfect breath holding" should be replaced by that of "calm breathing" which means a very subtle, practically non-existent breath.

I think it would be absurd to strain and then hurt our body by trying to achieve an unnatural condition. So I am of the idea of increasing by a few numbers, be satisfied with these and not create feelings of inferiority. I think it is best to pay attention to the intensity of concentration and the joy and well-being gained from the practice.

After completing the required number of *Kriyas*, the practitioner should sit quietly in silence contemplating the results. The mind must gradually

⁶ It has been explained that everything that exists in the universe is made of a combination of these five forms of energy. To a kriyaban the theory of the *Tattwas* is not a theme of useless speculation. They are conceived as a concrete series of states of consciousness, whose intimate essence is experienced in the last part of the devotee's journey toward *the Absolute Consciousness*.

detach itself from all the various thoughts by plunging deeply into the vastness of stillness and perfect balance. There is no other *Sadhana*. The *Sahasrara Chakra* opens more and more as this silent meditation takes place.

Conclusion

As we have explained there are mainly two ways of teaching the *Higher Kriyas*. In this chapter we have described the first way. Now you are wondering what to do with these instructions. I think that you want to experiment with these techniques and decide which ones will be part of your conclusive routine. Usually many people choose to continue practicing the *Second Kriya*.

However, life is yours. I want to hope that you find the time to learn and practice with enthusiasm also the second way in which the *Higher Kriyas* were taught. This will be a challenging but incomparable experience. We will talk about this in the next chapter.

[Here I want to explain how I got the information I shared in this chapter.

Even before the publication of this book I knew that the original *Second Kriya* was made up of the *Thokar* technique, I knew that the same procedure repeated several times was called *Third Kriya*. I knew this from a friend who for several years had gone to the center linked to the organization of P.Y. in the vicinity of Calcutta. This center was sometimes frequented by Brahmin who had been initiated into *Kriya Yoga* many years ago. With this Brahmin my friend had spoken many times and discussed the dynamics of *Kriya*. So then I had no idea of the existence of an *Omkar* technique to be practiced before *Thokar*.

Many years later some French friends told me about it, they sent me a detailed instruction which I copied in my archives. It was still a few years before I received other documents from India which clearly stated the importance of this *Omkar* technique. They called it *Second Kriya*, while everything related to *Thokar* they called *Third Kriya*. I decided to practice this technique and realized its importance. This is why I describe it precisely in this chapter.

The movements of the *Thokar* were instead described to me with great accuracy by two friends who wrote to me from the USA: they had received it from an Indian master who for many years, before leaving his body, had lived in the United States. This teacher was initiated by *Sri Dubey* who drew on the teachings of *Panchanan Bhattacharya*.]

CHAPTER 9

LAHIRI MAHASAYA'S KRIYA YOGA (Higher Kriyas as taught by Satya Charan Lahiri)

The main characteristic of these procedures is that they are practiced in the condition of "calm breathing."

I learned these techniques from the school that comes from *Tincouri Lahiri* who received this instruction from his father *Lahiri Mahasaya*. [This lineage was continued mainly by his son *Satya Charan Lahiri* and his disciple, Dr. *Ashoke Kumar Chatterjee*.]

The fact is that this school believes that the three techniques we are about to describe are enough to cover the entirety of the spiritual path, not recognizing the need to practice the techniques described in the previous chapter. Therefore they call these techniques *Second*, *Third* and *Fourth Kriya*. This belief is criticized by other schools but I take it very seriously in fact these last practices are beautiful and above all complete.

To avoid confusion I will put in brackets the name given to them by *Panchanan Bhattacharya* or *Fifth*, *Sixth* and *Seventh Kriya*. The ideal study of all the *Higher Kriyas* as they were taught by *Panchanan Bhattacharya* should begin with what is explained in the eighth chapter and then continue with the techniques explained here, overcoming the problem of names

We will start with the *Second Kriya* which will be presented in three steps: *Amantrak*, *Samantrak* and *Thokar*. While the *Thokar* explained in the previous chapter hits the *Anahata Chakra* directly, this *Thokar* hits the *Muladhara Chakra*. It has been explained that when this *Chakra* is hit, the *Kundalini* energy rises to the heart *Chakra*. Hence the latter *Thokar* serves to complete the action of the former.

In the vision of *Kriya* as explained by *Satya Charan Lahiri* preparation is required before starting the practice of *Amantrak*. Specifically, it is asked to practice 200 *Kriya Pranayama* every day (once a day) for three months. Then, to begin the practice of *Samantrak* it is asked to practice 300 *Kriya Pranayama* every day for three months. The purpose of this preparation is to have reached the state of "calm breath" that we have talked about. I think, but of course I could be wrong, that such preparation is superfluous for those who have seriously practiced the techniques explained in the previous chapter.

The introduction to these *Higher Kriyas* begins with describing the *Tribhangamurari* form which is the symbol of *Sri Krishna*. (see fig. 7)

Tribhanga is a standing body position used in traditional Indian art and dance, where the body bends in one direction for the knees, the other direction for the hips and then the other again regarding the shoulders and neck. *Krishna* playing his flute is most often depicted in a position with the lower leg crossing with the other.

We will learn to perceive this form by engraving it into our body first by simply moving the awareness along a prescribed path, then this perception will be accompanied by the *Vasudeva Mantra*. Finally this perception will be strengthened by the help of particular movements of the head. By repeating this procedure many times, ascending from *Muladhara* to the head and descending, following the path with three curves, each *Chakra* will be strongly stimulated and a great transformation will take place in us.

Some say that the *Tribhangamurari movement* is a universal event that appears spontaneously when a person practices *Kriya Pranayama* for very long sessions (for example 200 or 300 repetitions during a single session.) I think that this movement rarely appears spontaneously: it is perceived after many attempts, acting patiently.

What happens when this current is perceived is difficult to express because we have no words to describe a reality that is beyond the mind. The *Tribhangamurari* current seems to belong to another world.

The 3 procedures *Amantrak*, *Samantrak* and *Thokar* are not to be practiced at the same time. If, to be able to go faster, one does this, the only effect is to imprint in one's mind a wrong way of conceiving the practice.

SECOND KRIYA: TRIBHANGAMURARI MACRO MOVEMENT [Correct name according to tradition : Fifth Kriya]

First stage of practice: Amantrak

Exceptionally, just to experience this *Tribhangamurari* movement, start with a long and deep inhalation. The tongue is in *Kechari Mudra* or in baby *Kechari*. Very slowly, raise your awareness along the spinal canal, from *Muladhara* to *Bindu* (*Bindu*, the *Sikha* point, is located at the back of the head below the *Sahasrara Chakra* where the hairline forms a kind of vortex).

Then start a deep exhalation. *Prana* and awareness move slowly along the *Tribhangamurari* path. The *Tribhangamurari* path starts from *Bindu* risers very slightly towards the left part of the brain then descends towards the right part of the body. Once it reaches a particular point in the back (which is about 5-6 centimeters higher than the height of the right nipple) it curves and moves to the left crossing the heart node. After

reaching a point in the back (which is 5-6 centimeters lower than the height of the left nipple) it changes direction again and points towards *Muladhara*. This whole procedure, going up and down takes about a minute.

The correct practice, however, is to be able to perceive this path only mentally, forgetting the breath that will be free and very calm. Try several times to feel this inner movement.

We call this technique "*Amantrak*" which means "without the use of a *Mantra*". We have said that it is possible to perceive a complete movement of *Amantrak* in one minute. Whoever completes a lap in a shorter time, say 40 seconds, must not think that the practice is wrong.

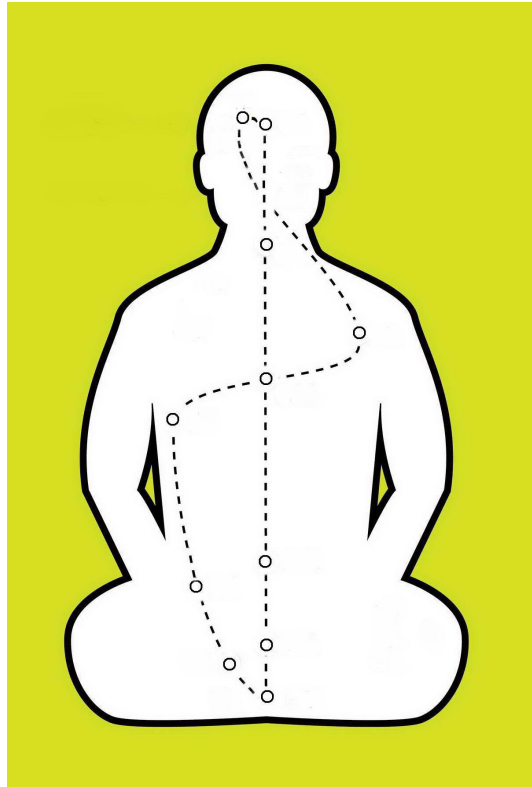


Fig7 Tribhangamurari path as seen from the back

We come to underline the most important aspect of this practice. Its essence consists in a constant intensification of mental pressure along the entire circuit. Consider the physical action of squeezing a nearly empty tube of toothpaste with a pencil to squeeze out whatever remains. Well, this image gives you a good idea of the amount of mental pressure you need to apply during this procedure. When you use great strength of concentration and will, there is no limit to the increase in energy flow along the *Tribhangamurari* path.

As for the routine, this advice is given: "For two weeks repeat this technique 25 times, once a day. Then for another two weeks repeat it 50

times, once a day; then for another two weeks 75 times and so on up to 200 times a day for two weeks. Only at this point are you supposed to be ready to practice the following *Samantrak* instruction."

Second stage of practice: Samantrak

Samantrak means: "with the use of a *Mantra*." Also in this procedure the breath is free, totally forgotten. [This is the usual teaching – but you are free to use an almost invisible form of breathing as long as this option proves useful and does not push you to proceed too quickly.]

The syllables *Om*, *Na*, *Mo*, *Bha*, *Ga* are vibrated respectively in the first five *Chakras*, *Ba* in *Bindu*. *Tee* (with eee... prolonged) is chanted in the upper center which is located in the left side of the brain. The syllables *Va*, *Su*, *De* and *Va* are placed in the four new centers outside the spine; *Yaaa* is vibrated in *Muladhara*.

These five new centers are to be considered five "vortexes" in the main flow of the current – therefore they are not a new set of *Chakras*. Each syllable, when vibrated, acts like a mental *Thokar*, like a tap that occurs in stillness. As the technique is performed slowly, there is plenty of time to make this stimulation very effective.

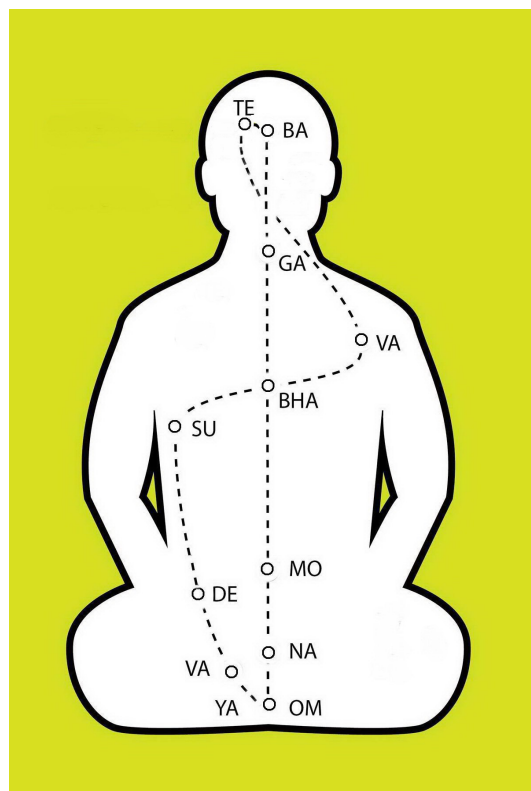


Fig.8 Tribhagamurari path, enriched with the syllables of the Mantra

The *Samantrak* route also takes about one minute. However, 40/45 seconds is an excellent time.

The essence of this procedure is to do what we have done in

Amantrak and also to strengthen the mental pressure on the entire path by mentally vibrating the 12 syllables of the *Mantra*.

The number of daily practice repetitions that we have recommended for *Amantrak* practice now remain the same. ["For two weeks 25 times, once a day. Then 50 times once a day and so on up to 200"]

Don't be in a hurry

Amantrak and *Samantrak* create the perception of a particular inner movement in your body. The *Thokar* procedure should only be applied when this energy flow is well imprinted in your consciousness.

These techniques, correctly applied, have the power to create a permanent transformation in your attitude towards *Kriya*.

The syllables of the *Mantra* (*Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya*) are placed with great care as seeds in each center, they will change your mood. It's like turning on various lights along the three-curve path. It is as if the rays of a sun in a clear sky are finally entering your practice. You will make acquaintance with a hitherto unknown state of ecstasy while fully experiencing the beauty of life.

Some students try to immediately savor the power of *Thokar Tribhangamurari* and they do so through a sporadic, disordered experimentation of *Amantrak* and *Samantrak* far from respecting the said rules. What could be the true impact of the *Thokar Tribhangamurari* technique remains so unknown and not even remotely foreshadowed.

Third stage of practice: Thokar

[Remember that this *Thokar* is different from the one described in chapter 8]

Forget the breath. The hands (with intertwined fingers) are placed on the navel area so as to push up the abdominal region, thus creating a mental pressure on the first three *Chakras*. Place your chin on your chest and move your energy and awareness very slowly along the spinal column from *Muladhara* to *Bindu*.

The chin rises slowly as you "touch" each *Chakra* internally with the syllables of the *Mantra* (*Om* is placed in the first *Chakra*, *Na* in the second ...). When energy and awareness are in the *Bindu*, the chin is parallel to the ground.

Now the descent of the energy starts. The movement of the head will follow the energy flow along the *Tribhangamurari* path millimeter by millimeter. Everything will happen smoothly, in the space of thirty seconds or less. The description of the head movements that I am about to describe

will, at first glance, seem complicated. With a minimum of patience, the right movement of the head will be learned: it is enough to understand that it has been conceived in the most logical and effective way to intensify the particular sinuous flow of energy and awareness. So we come to describe the movements of the head.

Without turning your face, move your head to the left, a couple of centimeters, then return to the middle by lifting your chin. During this movement the inner flow of energy moves from the Bindu to a higher point on the left side of the brain, as shown in the drawing. Stay in this position for just a moment while mentally saying the syllable *Tee*.

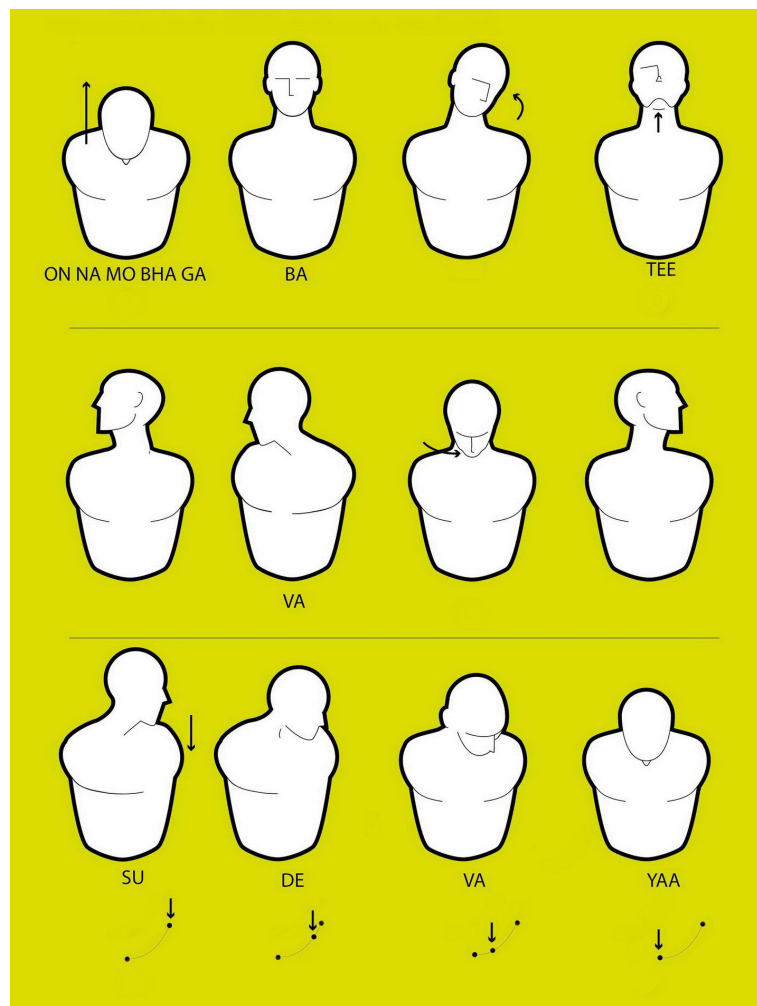


Fig.9 Thokar Tribhangamurari as seen from the front

Slowly turn your face to the right. Only the face moves, not the trunk. During this SLOW movement the internal flow of energy moves from the brain to the point of the back on the right side of the back. Everything happens as in *Amantrak*, as in *Samantrak* but now these simple movements of the head perfectly accompany the descent of the energy. Here the first of the five psycho-physical blows occurs: the chin touches the right shoulder

for a moment and the syllable *Va* is vibrated in the eighth center. The shoulder also makes a small upward movement to make contact with the chin easier. But beware: if you feel you are forcing it, don't! If you cannot touch the right shoulder with the chin, be content to get as close to the shoulder as possible and stimulate the eighth center with pure mental strength and the vibration of the syllable *Va*.

Then the face slowly turns to the left accompanying, millimeter by millimeter, the internal flow of energy from the eighth to the ninth center, crossing the fourth *Chakra*. Now, if possible, the chin should reach over the left shoulder. The second blow occurs when the syllable *Su* is vibrated in the ninth center as the chin briefly touches the left shoulder – the shoulder makes a small upward movement to make contact with the chin easier.

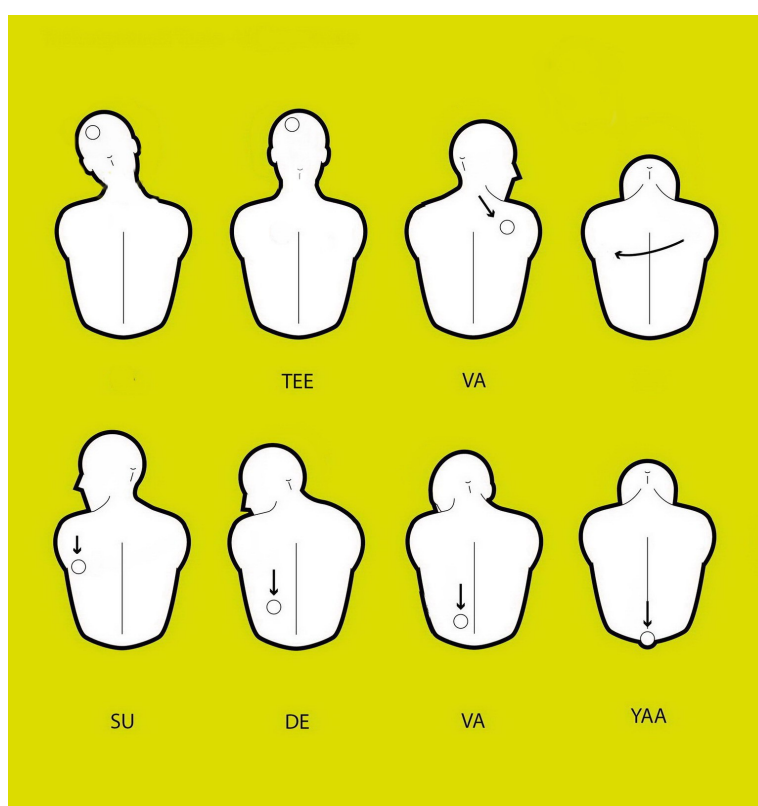


Fig.10 The same movements (only the descent) as seen from the back

Two more hits occur when the syllables *De* and *Va* are placed in the tenth and eleventh center. The modality is the following: the chin moves slowly towards the center of the chest, touching the left collarbone. During this movement, two light strokes are given to the left collarbone in intermediate positions. The blows, of course, are given when the syllables of the *Mantra* are vibrated. Finally, a blow is given to the chest (central position) when the syllable *Ya* is vibrated in *Muladhara*.

I hope it is clear that the essence of this particular procedure is to use

the movements of the head (with the five strokes) to encourage a further intensification of mental pressure along the entire circuit.

Repeat the procedure 36 times. After completing the programmed number of rounds, calm the system by means of a minimal practice of *Samantrak*, then relax by practicing a simple mental *Pranayama*.

Expert supervision helps to avoid problems – I mean physical problems of overexertion and pain in the cervical vertebrae and neck muscles. Abrupt movements should be avoided; in their place a great mental intensity of concentration is used. For a couple of weeks it is good to avoid practicing this *Thokar* every day. Better every two or three days.

Remark

During this procedure the *Tribhangamurari* flow is intensified by the movements of the head. The problem is that many *kriyabans* focus all attention on delivering the blows and do not understand the value of creating mental pressure along every millimeter of the path.

We began by perceiving the sensation of movement that rises along the spine and descends along the three-curve path. Then with the *Samantrak* procedure we strengthened the perception of the 12 centers. Now we must feel that the movements of the head perfectly accompany, millimeter after millimeter, the flow of the internal current. We can try to intensify the perception of the internal flow by creating a mental pressure along each part of it. The movements of the head therefore serve to "touch with pressure" every millimeter of the path, up and down. The chin should be moved slowly as if we were trying to overcome a strong resistance. We suggested the idea: "like squeezing a nearly empty tube of toothpaste with a pencil to get the last little bit out."

Incremental routine of the Tribhangamurari macro movement

As soon as possible, aim to complete the incremental routine of this procedure. This will be a momentous time in your life.

The prescribed doses are as follows: 36x1, 36x2, 36x3,... .. 36x35, 36x36. Attention: between one stage and the next stage, at least a week always elapses! This routine is very important. The effects are strong and involve a great inner transformation. A minimum of 8-10 months is required to complete it.

Therefore, while *Amantrak* and *Samantrak* were practiced every day, the incremental sessions of *Thokar Tribhangamurari* will be practiced once a week: the time needed to metabolize the subconscious material that the strong action exerted on *Muladhara* and the heart *Chakra* brings to the surface.

It starts with 36 rounds; a week later you practice 36x2, then 36x3 ...

and, by increasing, you finally get to 36x36 repetitions. This means 1296 full rounds!

Can you imagine the powerful effects of this action? 1296 means that you start in the morning and finish at night, repeating the same action many times over. There is no doubt that you will be able to open the door of the *Sushumna*! Of course you have prepared this experience by practicing 36x35, and before 36x34 And let's not forget that you have practiced *Amantrak* and *Samantrak* for several months!

A personal tip on this Incremental Routine

What I am explaining to you here is not part of the original teaching, so make the use that your intuition suggests. This is just an observation made by me and by some researchers, my friends, who have shared these experiences with me.

I am simply referring that you may find that *Thokar* works very effectively if you practice it from a certain moment onward by whispering the syllables of the *Mantra*.

During the initial part of the incremental session of *Thokar Tribhangamurari*, keep your mouth closed and tongue in *Kechari Mudra*. But after half of the session, forget *Kechari*, and begin to whisper each of the twelve syllables, mentally directing them towards the seat of the respective center. You will feel that each slight pronunciation creates a sensation of warmth in each center; you will perceive a particular joy. Proceed slowly "exhaling" each syllable on each center from your lips. This light touch accompanied by a mental intention has a particular power that creates joy. Remarkable is what happens during the downward movement, that is with the last six syllables, in particular in *Muladhara* where you can stop: in those moments create the desire to increase the sense of joy and you will succeed!

A second personal tip

After completing this long process (*Amantrak*, *Samantrak* and *Thokar*) you can experience the following procedure. This is also not part of the original teaching.

Thokar Tribhangamurari using the breath

We have described the *Tribhangamurari* techniques explaining that they must be practiced with free, uncontrolled breathing. Now let's try to describe the *Thokar* procedure involving the breath. It is a variant adopted by some: I find it fantastic!

Inhale by mentally placing the syllables *Om Na Mo Bha Ga Ba* in the

relevant *Chakras*. The chin is raised by accompanying the current within the spine. At this point hold your breath and, in this state of *Kumbhaka*, mentally descend along the *Tribhangamurari* three-curve path, doing the typical movements of *Thokar Tribhangamurari*, placing the five mental syllables *Tee Va Su De Va* in the centers that are outside the spine dorsal. The syllable *Yaaa* is placed in *Muladhara*.

Usually the final three blows (*De Va Yaaa*) produce a sense of ecstasy. The last movement, that is the blow on *Muladhara*, is pleasant in a special way: the energy is intensified in this *Chakra*. Take a few seconds to feel this sensation of energy.

Now begin a slow exhalation creating with the breath a clear sound *eeeeee* Feel that the *Om* vibration comes down from the *Medulla* and penetrates the heart *Chakra*. It is important to feel it strongly in the heart.

The practice is so beautiful that you will often go into an ecstatic state during the practice itself. You will feel drunk with joy. Repeat this procedure 36 times. Then you can close this practice by resuming the *Samantrak* technique – with a free breath while maintaining stillness.

Digression on the Effects of Intensive Thokar Practice

We are often governed by superficial emotions that come from our fears, our weaknesses, our pessimism. Very important is the ability to keep these emotions at bay, continuing on one's own path even when we suffer from an excruciating conflict. It is the incremental *Thokar* routine we have just described that helps us control those emotions.

I tried to trace the topic "emotions" in some oriental books but I encountered so much rhetoric, so many words that do not touch the essence of the problem. These texts distinguish between positive emotions (affection, happiness, fulfillment ...) and negative (envy, aggression and illusion ...) After boring and useless rankings, we still cannot grasp the essential fact: superficial emotions that are not controlled can create disasters in our life.

We all know how violent, frantic and hysterical emotions often suddenly arise in our being and soon disappear. In fact, they express a private reality of authentic depth, but they possess a driving force that ends in hasty actions, experienced in a kind of cerebral fever nourished by a petty visceral pleasure. When passion inflames the whole being, it is not possible to listen to the guidance of common sense.

Just as in summer the hail grains are created, condensed and thickened in the air before falling to the earth producing all possible disasters, fatal decisions begin to take shape in our imaginations. During frequent daydreams, the prospect of giving up something positive but demanding a lot of effort casts a false light on our immediate future, so that what in the past would have made us ashamed of cowardice now seems to

shine on the horizon of our existence as a dull, shapeless, gloomy sky that suddenly becomes serene and lights up with a bright blue.

When we are drawn into action by such seductive emotions we pave the way for catastrophe. A wrong decision will be our crucifixion, a solid and definitive pact with a state of disappointment that will last a lifetime.

Sometimes it almost seems as if a person wants to stubbornly assert their "*right to pain and suffering*" [this is an expression of *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo's chief disciple and companion.] An indomitable force is capable of creating misfortunes in our life. For example, sudden emotions push one to interrupt a course of study and throw away a profession that he has dreamed of for years, for which he has fought, suffered. It does the same with a loved one, with friends, with the family itself. Nothing can stop this person: the wise words of true friends no longer have any power.

We often break important ties with people because we think some of our choices have received unwarranted criticism. A breakup of a friendship relationship is a great loss, especially if it is the product of pride. Many people are bothered by sincere and constructive criticism as if it were a useless display of cruelty. The stronger a keen observation has, the more they feel as if they are swallowing a piece of black, sharp-edged stone.

A *kriyaban* who believes he is listening to the voice of his heart but who is actually driven by humiliating frustrations can reject any argument and harm himself in various ways with actions that astound those around him. A few days or months pass and a sense of heaviness appears; the subtle deception of the mind, however, creates the firm conviction that every person endowed with dignity could not have acted differently. The person loves to repeat to himself that underneath his actions there is a sacred motive linked to destiny and karma.

If the risk of retracing one's steps appears, pride prevails. Wisdom has no chance of prevailing. A strange frenzy fills the mind, ensuring that every action is enjoyed with an uninterrupted voluptuousness, surrounded by flashes of blue. Yet in the heart will remain a pain that will never end. Much of one's spiritual aspiration will remain trapped in a past that can no longer be reached due to the fear of having to bear the full impact of a true and honest memory.

Well, an intense work with the Thokar, protracted, if necessary, for years is the only thing that can affect the perverse mechanism we have described. By working hard with this procedure we can change our attitude to act in the way we have tried to describe. Understanding *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya* also means understanding this!

THIRD KRIYA: TRIBHANGAMURARI MICRO MOVEMENT

[Correct name according to tradition : Sixth Kriya]

Introducing a person to this procedure means explaining that the *Tribhangamurari* movement also exists within each *Chakra* in small dimensions, for this reason we speak of the *Tribhangamurari micro movement*.

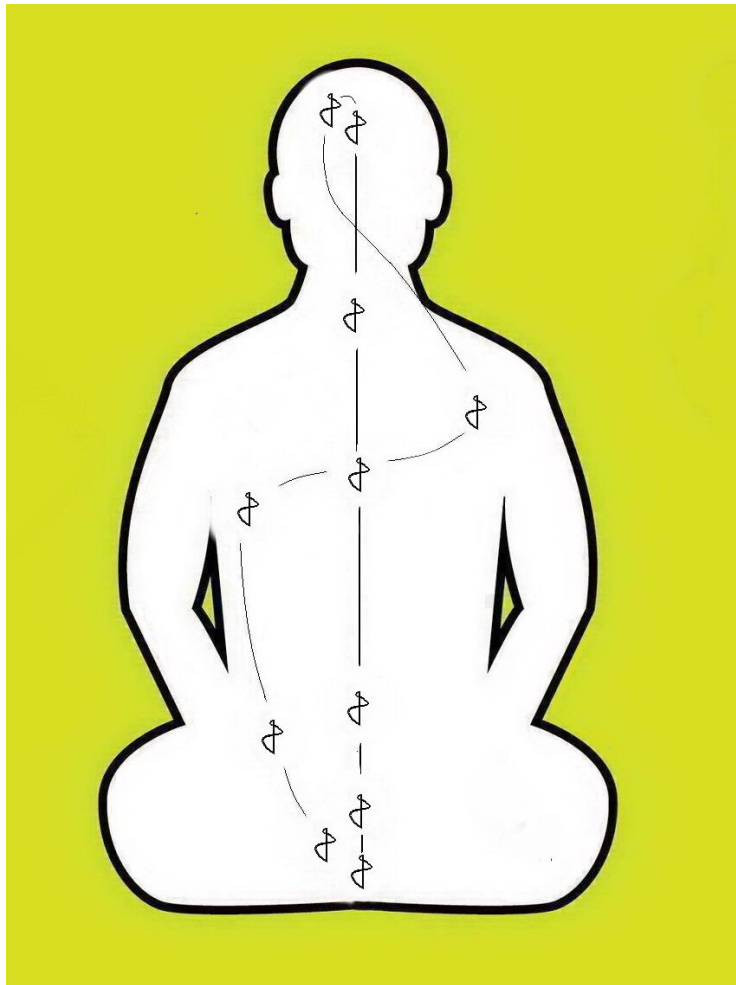


Fig.11 Tribhangamurari micro movement in each of the 12 centers

The work in the spine now takes place in a more subtle way, in each of the twelve centers that are found along the *Tribhangamurari* path. The time required to repeat this work in each center up and down becomes very large. Usually one faces this practice in the last years of his life. Then, when the work in the *Chakras* is completed, one repeats this practice only in *Kutastha* preparing for the *Mahasamadhi*: the final conscious exit from the body at the moment of death.

This *Kriya* is taught in two steps: *Amantrak* and *Samantrak*. This practice is

globally called *Muladhara Granti Ved* (unfastening the knot of *Muladhara*.) I do not want to indulge in rhetorical quotations, I can only say that by means of this procedure one becomes able to leave the dimension of time and space and reach the highest state of *Asamprajnata Samadhi* which leads to the *Kaivalya* state.

Practical instruction: how to perceive the Micro movement

We first learn to experience the *Tribhangamurari* movement in small dimensions within each of the 12 centers of the *Tribhangamurari* path. Keep the shape of this movement in your mind.

Do this experiment: through a short inhalation, lift the *Prana* from *Muladhara* to the spiritual eye between the eyebrows. Lower your chin slightly, hold your breath and look "down" at the *Muladhara Chakra*. Visualize it as a horizontal disk with a diameter of about 2-3 centimeters. Slowly try to perceive the *Tribhangamurari* movement in reduced dimensions on that disc.

Don't worry about the time it takes – it can be short, it can be long ... it doesn't matter. Apply moderate but continuous pressure on the disc as if you were holding a pen and making a clear and precise mark.

From this moment on forget the breath. Repeat this practice only mentally in the first *Chakra*. Move to the second *Chakra* and repeat the same procedure. Continue trying to perceive the micro-movement in *Chakras* 3, 4 and 5, then in *Bindu*, then in the center that is above *Bindu*, then in the four centers that are located outside the spine and finish this your first round in *Muladhara*.

Practice three "rounds" of this technique (*Amantrak micro*) every day for at least three months before beginning to increase the mental pressure on each center using the syllables of the *Vasudeva Mantra* (*Samantrak micro*.)

Tribhangamurari micro movement utilizing the Mantra

Practice *Kechari Mudra*. Lift the *Prana* from the *Muladhara Chakra* into the spiritual eye. From this position look "down" and visualize the *Muladhara Chakra*. Your breath is free. Mentally repeat the syllables "*Om-Na-Mo-Bha-Ga-Ba-Te-Va-Su-De-Va-Ya*". Do this *Japa* without haste. Try to feel the *Tribhangamurari micro-movement* and realize how the 12 syllable mental chanting adds more "pressure" to it.

Remain motionless without making any movement of the spinal column or head. Here all the power of pressure must be obtained by the pure repetition of the syllables of the *Mantra*. Each syllable is like a small "pulse." What we explained to help the perception of the *macro movement*, that is, whispering the syllables instead of simply thinking them, still

applies here. So make several attempts at what is most useful to you and decide for yourself.

The duration of a *micro movement* depends on the speed with which you repeat the *Mantra*. For many people it lasts approximately 10-12 seconds. Remember *Lahiri Mahasaya's* recommendation: "Don't be in a hurry!" Try to feel the difference between going slow and going fast. If you go slowly you will feel enormous power.

Repeat the *Vasudeva Mantra* three times. The *Prana* remains totally in the head. After three perceptions of the micro movement, repeat the same procedure for *Chakras* 2, 3, 4 and 5, then *Bindu*, then the point above *Bindu* on the left, then the four centers outside the spine and finally *Muladhara*. This is one "round": the practice of three rounds is excellent for concluding any *Kriya Yoga* routine. At the end of this practice, remain with the awareness centered in the light that you will perceive in the upper part of the head. If you proceed without haste, you will get a state that can be defined as "beyond time."

If, after the practice, you find the time to lie down on your back (*Savasana*) you will get a particular state of physical and mental stillness where the *Kundalini* energy can rise up to the heart *Chakra* while the *Kutastha* will reveal itself.

If you find time for an incremental routine you can increase by one round per session up to 20 rounds.

This technique has a mystery of Unearthly Beauty. Among the ruins of past illusions, it opens the doors of spiritual realization. This inner movement embodies the deeper aspect of the *Omkar* reality. Perceiving it means annihilating any form of duality present in the *Chakras* and therefore, in one's awareness. It is as if the center between the eyebrows becomes one with each *Chakra*, merging them into a single reality. The state of "absorption" created by having this particular perception in each *Chakra* is unmatched. A burning love for the Divine is born. Only a few *Kriya* schools have revealed the nature of this *micro movement* and revealed its importance. Unfortunately, many people are frantically searching for impossible surrogates for it!

Special incremental routine of the Tribhangamurari micro movement to be performed in the last part of life

When I received this instruction I was told that, similarly to *Yoni Mudra* which is practiced every night as a *kriyaban* sets out to take awareness out of the body and the physical world and prepares for sleep – which is a "little death" – thus the incremental routine of the *Tribhangamurari Micro Movement* is a peaceful return to the origin: a preparation to "die forever" – in the sense of becoming free forever, free in the Spirit. It has been

explained that this last incremental routine, in addition to being the best preparation for the conscious exit out of the body at the time of death (*Mahasamadhi*), burns forever the need to reincarnate.

As for what happens during the *Mahasamadhi* process, we have heard many stories about possible "*Kriya* ways" of leaving the physical shell, but obviously we cannot guarantee their authenticity. Some claim that the typical way is *Thokar*, others hint at procedures which take place completely in *Kutastha*. We can reasonably assume that it is not always possible to perform the physical movement of *Thokar*. Focusing your awareness in the spine or the point between the eyebrows may be the only possible action.

Now let's clarify how this last routine is accomplished.

In this incremental routine (*Amantrak*: without using the *Mantra*) we have 36 practice sessions. What's new is that most of these sessions take more than a day.

On the first day, 36 *Micro movements* are perceived in each of the 12 centers. The second session requires to perceive 36x2 *Micro movements* in each center. [72 *Micro movements* are experienced in the first *Chakra* without interruption, then 72 in the second *Chakra* and so on] After a few days, the third session is practiced which includes 36x3 *Micro movements* in each center. Then other days pass. Then we have the 36x4 whose practice can take up a whole day.

The next steps: 36x5, 36x6, 36x7 36x8 usually take a full day and even part of the following day. Here what is normally not done happens: sleeping a whole night between the two parts of what is considered a single session. What is important is that in the morning of the following day you recover more or less immediately after waking up. So it is not allowed to go to work and it is also recommended to remain silent, avoiding any opportunities for conversation. (The use of common sense should always prevail, however; if someone speaks to us, a polite response is always a duty.)

It can now be understood that if the following sessions take several days; the last session takes about 12 days!

Just to be sure that one understands, let's try to describe what happens during the last session: one perceives 36x36 micro movements in each center! This means: 1296 micro movements in *Muladhara*, 1296 in *Swadhisthana* and so on, ending again after several days in *Muladhara* with 1296 perceptions.

I must emphasize that it is not allowed to skip any stages. Don't

think, "During my next summer vacation I will easily find a dozen days to practice 36x36." No! It doesn't work that way. Before you can feel the *Micro movement* 36x36 times in each center, you must have felt it 36x35 times. And first of this, 36x34 times, and so on

Completing this incremental routine without using the *Mantra* and then repeating it using the 12-syllable *Mantra* is truly a gigantic achievement. Many wonderful experiences will happen and the last internal obstacles will be dissolved one after the other. When the practice is completed, one finds that one cannot describe one's experience as the bliss experienced has partially erased from memory what happened.

A *kriyaban* should make every effort to create the opportunity to indulge (as old age approaches) the joy, the privilege of completing the recommended number of repetitions without ever giving in to the temptation to practice hastily.

FOURTH KRIYA: TRIB. MICRO MOVEMENT IN KUTASTHA

[Correct name according to tradition : Seventh Kriya]

As we said in the introduction to the *Tribhangamurari micro movement*, in the last moments of life, when this work in the *Chakras* is completed, one concentrates only in *Kutastha*. The main purpose of this instruction is to penetrate the star of *Kutastha*.

Instruction

Mentally repeat the syllables of the *Mantra* you have used so far in the space between the eyebrows until you really see the *Tribhangamurari* form. It is clear that it does not originate from the visualization process. This experience is a spontaneous experience that occurs at the right time.

PART III: HOW TO AVOID FAILURE ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH

CHAPTER 10 [FIRST PART]

AN IMPORTANT UNDERSTANDING

FAILURE OF KRIYA REPORTED ON SOME FORUMS

I think that the considerations I make here are really important for those who are about to practice *Kriya*. These arise from a serious problem that was widely discussed on some *Kriya* Forums, especially concerning the form of *Kriya* that I learned from my first organization.

Reading carefully, it seems that there are people who have devoted a lot of time, effort to the practice of *Kriya*. Well, they complain that they have not gotten anywhere. Some have spent years in meditation only to realize that they have not made any progress.

Each person is different and each person approaches *Kriya* for his personal reasons. Let's put aside those reasons that have nothing to do with the spiritual path and that could have been solved more easily with a visit to a doctor, or therapy, or changing jobs, or moving or whatever. Let's deal with genuine reasons, those that come from seriously motivated people.

From these Forums it would appear that this technique does not produce what it promises. Some have practiced *Kriya* for 30 years and yet they have not achieved anything, indeed their life seems to have been destroyed. It is claimed that *Kriya* teaches how to immerse ourselves internally to receive the pearls of enlightenment. Unfortunately, someone has never found anything other than constant boredom that numbed their mind. Some detached observer claims that someone's mind is so clouded by this mental numbing practice that they will continue to practice these techniques mechanically to the grave. The idea of self-realization continues to keep a person tied to a practice that turns out to be lethargic.

The practitioner's faith in God and his willingness to move forward in the practice have been severely tested. Some traditions call these spiritual trials the "dark night of the soul".

It must be said of course that many recognize that from time to time, meditations effortlessly flow into a deep state of awareness: one's thoughts, breath, feelings – everything – ceases to exist. There are momentary experiences of stillness, bliss. These rare moments are the reward for one's spiritual endeavors. But this really doesn't seem like a great thing.

Difficult situation of those who live as monks

The situation becomes much more serious when we take into consideration

those people who wish to live a life of self-denial by withdrawing from the active life, for example by entering a monastery (in the field of *Kriya* it is called *Ashram*.)

The reality is that living as a monk is a huge effort: behind the walls of the convent there are many monks who have sworn to live in perfect celibacy, simplicity, loyalty and obedience. Their Rule is drastic: many hours of meditation and many hours of Silence.

Unfortunately, many realized that entering into a condition so ardently desired had not fulfilled the purpose for which this decision had been made. The ardent mystical inspiration that had accompanied them in their choice almost disappeared.

The initial conquered free time, instead of being devoted to fruitful progress along the spiritual path, is exhausted in boring, non-creative pursuits.

It no longer inspires them to listen to the talks (*Satsanga*) of their spiritual guides explaining that the *Guru* is "a self-realized master" and that following the teachings of the master leads to Self Realization. Many years after their entry, these people realized that the best for them was not entering a monastery.

Some former monks tell us that a rigid routine, based on unlivable ideals, presents many difficulties. It is clear that the monastery rules were designed to establish habits and ensure time to practice meditation. Unfortunately many have continued to struggle with the monotony of practicing the same techniques, in the same way, with the same people, day after day, year after year.

The striking contrast is that *Kriya* teachers claim that practicing meditation means experiencing an *ever new joy*. Unfortunately, they rarely found joy in these monotonous meditations.

Many believe that the life of a monk is full of peace, contentment and brotherly love. Well, some psychologists who have visited these *ashrams* have found that the monks' lifestyle is one of the most stressful occupations, along with air traffic controllers, police and firefighters.

Below the surface, in the hearts and minds of some monks there is a lot of anxiety, fear and even psychosis. The goal of being "perfect," the impossible ideal of being representatives of God and the *guru*, can have a devastating effect.

Outwardly, the monks imitate the holy ascetics, mystics and saints and give visitors the impression of being happy, blessed and mirrors of the divine. Internally, they live ... in quiet despair. Unfortunately this is what we read in the Forums.

Many, after years of titanic efforts, persistently continue to live within this dimension, others have decided to return to the world.

Let us consider finally a fact that seems absurd and inhumane to me: monks are required to have overcome sexual desire. For them, sex is strictly forbidden. How reasonable is it to ask for this? Anyone who accepts this request immediately realizes how terrible the inner struggle is, while chastity remains a practically impossible goal.

We boldly say that, contrary to *Hindu* traditions and *yoga* mythology, sexual activity goes hand in hand with health and long life and not the other way around, as some stupid traditions claim. Science explains that sex strengthens the parasympathetic nervous system (which slows the heartbeat), allowing it to better counteract its sympathetic nervous system (which accelerates the heartbeat).

My thought, for what little it's worth, is that if you want to practice *Kriya* don't even consider the problem of chastity because it's not a problem: deal with *Kriya* by placing your trust in the laws of nature. Don't believe in genuine nonsense. Do not try to follow impossible and unnatural precepts. Do not live in a continuous excruciating conflict even going as far as the rejection of love.

Lahiri Mahasaya admitted in his diaries that sexual desire was sometimes very strong. One day a disciple asked him a direct question: "How can one be definitively free from sexuality?" He replied in a way that left the astonished disciple: "I will be free from sexuality only when my body lies on the funeral pyre." God bless this sincerity! (I knew a *kriyaban* who was so attached to his illusions that he took the above episode as a sign that ... *Lahiri Mahasaya* was not a realized soul!)

HYPOTHESIS

Let's drop the problem of chastity now and let's try to formulate a hypothesis on the situation outlined in the Forums. This hypothesis starts from the observation that a misleading advertising on *Kriya* has attracted to this discipline people who are not suitable for it.

At first, people read PY's *Autobiography*. This book plays a decisive role in creating illusions. Those who read it begin to show excessive enthusiasm for the idea of being able to experience something extraordinary. It suggests that *Kriya* comes to us from an *Avatar*, and it works mathematically. Some people apply for the correspondence course, are enthusiastic about the lessons, feel in harmony and peace. Finally something in their life seems to be going in the right direction! The meaning of life is revealed! They are happy because they believe these teachings are the airway to the Divine etc.

But over time they realize that the enthusiastic words about the "extraordinary effects of *Kriya*" have created a colossal deception. It would have been better not to talk about the "Science of *Kriya Yoga*": it would

have been more honest to simply say that *Kriya Yoga* is a very effective method for walking the spiritual path and consists of methods of concentration and breath control, methods that require effort and constant application. No other words are needed: these are enough to attract those who are ready.

I do not mean that PY's *Autobiography* be full of illusions. From reading it we receive a clear teaching: whoever faces this path should seek only the Divine and not miraculous powers. However, the reader may linger between the idea of seeking only the Divine, without asking for more, and the pernicious idea of using the power of the will to achieve special health and life-related results. The idea that *Kriya* has a scientific basis and is therefore automatic in its effects is the leitmotif that characterizes PY's writings. Unfortunately, this idea has deluded many people.

In my opinion, the practice of *Kriya* cannot offer guaranteed results. It is said that *Kriya* is "the supreme of all spiritual techniques, the air way to the realization of God" but this does not guarantee you that you will be able to benefit from it.

Affirming that Spiritual Evolution is linked to the number of *Kriya* breaths you will practice becomes an even more inconsistent mirage. Unfortunately these are unclear words. I don't know if you have ever examined with the lens of wisdom the idea that each *Kriya* breath corresponds to a year of spiritual evolution. I ask you this: if you met a true mystic, would you have the courage to affirm this belief in front of him? I really think that you would not dare to meet his gaze realizing that this nonsense would be immediately exposed.

The idea that *Kriya* is the art of manipulating our *karma* and thereby accelerating our evolution comes from magical literature. If you study the history of esoteric movements you will be able to fully understand the origin of this idea. Our approach to *Kriya Yoga* should be very different.

It is difficult for us to consider *Kriya* as "just another meditation technique". But the fact is that it is just that. The "magic" connected to *Kriya* closes people's minds. They feel they must think of this path as "sacred" by not allowing anyone to question it. They cannot accept a reality, bitter to them, that some people may have problems with it.

MY VISION ON THE ESSENCE OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

I think the *Kriya* path is not suitable for those who live only in the mental sphere and do not possess a genuine, sincere aspiration for spiritual experience. Unfortunately many people who are interested in *Kriya Yoga* have a very confused idea of what a spiritual path is.

So let's try to clarify the difference between this concept and that of professing a certain religion. I have already touched on this problem in the

first chapter of the book by explaining how slow my process of understanding what the spiritual dimension is.

A human being comes into the world within the confines of a small body and for a long time tries only to familiarize himself with it and with everything that can be defined as the physical dimension (feeding, learning to act by becoming masters of one's body, interacting with other people, learn various activities...). Then he begins to experience the emotional and sentimental dimension (first of all uncontrollable emotions that arise from instinct such as fear, attraction for certain situations and for certain people and likewise feeling a sense of unpleasantness for other situations and then the sentimental dimension such as feeling affection, love..). This second dimension begins to appear almost together with birth to the physical dimension and then develops throughout the entire existence. Roughly towards adolescence the third dimension begins to appear, the mental one. It does not simply consist in the fact that the brain works, which happens much earlier, but in the possibility of formulating thoughts with one's own head. The pleasure of sharing or, conversely, of opposing other people's thinking and behavior appears. The development of one's interests takes place, the formulation of projects concerning one's future, dealing with various philosophical, existential visions. At a certain moment of existence, the fourth birth, the one to the spiritual dimension, may take place, it is not certain that it will take place. Understanding what this dimension is is not easy. Those born into mental life only, and most people are, cannot understand what it means to be born into this realm.

First of all, let us try to understand how being born into the spiritual dimension is not equivalent to deciding to follow a religion. Religion is based on working mainly with the mind to create, approve certain rules of behavior, therefore understanding well what are the things that must be done and those that must be avoided, create a theological vision and then ask the fundamental existential questions. Religion deals in a very secondary way with the fact that it is possible to reach an ecstatic state, or to have an experience of a spiritual nature. This is considered a very rare fact indeed, sometimes it is viewed with suspicion and disbelief.

Religion consists mainly of maintaining a set of beliefs: its nature is a continuous mental and psychological work. So let's not confuse following a religion with having a spiritual experience. Being a mystic has nothing to do with religion: only a concrete spiritual experience can make you a mystic, nothing else.

Many times it happens that a religious person sincerely believes that he lives within the spiritual dimension. But if this person is concerned only with the things to be believed, the rituals to be attended or with subtle

problems of theology, it could be that the spiritual life is still far away, indeed almost unattainable, for such a person. It is not possible to reach spiritual reality by acting only within the mental dimension.

Birth into spiritual life, this 'fourth birth' rarely happens. There are two moments that characterize it: the first moment is the one in which the intuition manifests itself that there is a reality that lies beyond the physical universe and beyond the sphere of our thoughts and the desire to experience it, to touch it with hand, is born; the second moment is when this reality actually manifests itself: only then can a person be said to be born into the spiritual life.

[I] The first moment usually takes place with the encounter, of great emotional value, with the beautiful, inspiring things in life: pure human love, attraction for Beauty in whatever form it manifests, being strongly struck by one or more artistic manifestations, the attraction for the experience of various mystics, of saints of whom we have had news.

[II] The second moment, or rather the actual encounter with the spiritual dimension, arises from a real experience. It is characterized by suddenly entering a state of ecstatic absorption. In this state nothing exists in consciousness but the contemplation of a reality beyond the mind. Here: this is the spiritual dimension.

Note

Sometimes these two phases occur in reverse order: a spiritual experience occurs unexpectedly, while the understanding that there is a spiritual reality occurs later.

At least the first phase of the spiritual dimension should be present in those who would like to undertake the practice of *Kriya Yoga*. Unfortunately some would like to face it only with a mental, scientific attitude, without an authentic, sincere aspiration. In this case it is certain that these people will face failure!

Now let us ask ourselves: how does the direct experience of spiritual reality take place? This can happen through forming a habit of gathering in a meditation practice, but it can also happen through other experiences that we may have doubts about, such as the NDE near-death experiences that you can read about in abundance. I prefer not to address particular experiences obtained with the use of drugs. What we must keep in mind is that when an authentic spiritual experience occurs, it positively changes a person's entire life.

The most common occurrence is that a person with sincere spiritual aspiration practices a meditation technique for some time with absolute dedication and finally something happens. What occurs is a contact with an inexplicable joy that comes from the center of one's being, from the depths of one's soul. This is called "mystical experience." This experience moves you deeply, it evokes in you a love, an irrepressible aspiration towards this reality that you have touched with your hand, which has taken place in your body, in your consciousness.

Of course it is clear that the contact with what lies beyond the mind cannot be described in precise terms, it can only be intuited. Over time, some who have had this experience may realize that it is somehow related to the spine, to the spiritual centers found within it and to the intuitive vision that occurs with the "third eye."

Indeed, sometimes contact with spiritual reality is accompanied by the experience of a strong current of energy in the spine. It must be said that this experience, especially when it occurs for the first time, can be preceded by inexplicable fear, at times by real anguish.

Now let's try to put ourselves in the shoes of those who are perfectly satisfied with life and who simply want to enjoy it: their mind is full of plans to launch in different, countless directions. Well, why should we advise them to get involved in the spiritual path? Maybe because they revealed to us that they have some psychological problems? Well, it is wise to avoid recommending them practices whose essence they do not understand: they would consider us strange, bizarre people who meddle in their affairs and in any case they would not understand anything of what we are trying to allude to.

Using *Kriya Yoga* to solve most human problems is like going to the doctor and complaining of a little heartburn after a meal and the doctor says we need a heart transplant. After reflecting on this aspect for a long time, I came to the conclusion that the number of people who are really ready for *Kriya*, for whom *Kriya* is the thing they need most in life, is very small.

A great many people do the right thing by setting aside any plans involving meditation practice for the present moment. It is good that these people live their lives, it is not the case that they make it more complicated by making useless efforts for a shorter or longer time.

The impetus to embark on the spiritual path cannot be artificially created by listening to the talks of various preachers. It arises from something that

is or is not. One must first have built his own vision of reality, answered the fundamental existential questions in his own way, giving a clear purpose to his life.

In conclusion a spiritual path has nothing to do with the decision to live in a different way by adopting a certain philosophy. It has even less to do with methods for enhancing the powers of the mind and not even with engaging in magical, esoteric, occult practices. In short, the spiritual life does not begin with a decision that is born and develops in a dimension that concerns the realm of the mind.

Being born on the spiritual path means touching something extremely beautiful that comes from another dimension, being effectively transformed by it and understanding that our existence can no longer remain the same. Here: in my opinion the practice of *Kriya Yoga* can be conceived only after having had this experience.

By starting the practice of *Kriya* one abandons the attempt to attain spiritual experience by merely studying the teachings that underlie the great religions. One is convinced that such studies only lead to enriching the mind with sterile concepts, definitions, theories. This leads to abandonment of all discussions with people who only like to use their ability to reason for the pure love of thinking. If anything, it means making them understand that even with intellectual research and reasoning, spiritual experience will never occur!

REASONS FOR MY CHOICE

The reason why, out of the many possible spiritual disciplines, I chose the path of *Kriya Yoga* lies in the fact that I have always been instinctively attracted to *Yoga*. In *Yoga* I understood the centrality of *Pranayama* – a procedure characterized by breath and energy control. I chose *Kriya Yoga* after reading the famous book *Autobiography of a Yogi* by P.Y.. This book explains that *Lahiri Mahasaya* had spread a *Pranayama* technique in four fundamental stages and called it *Kriya Yoga*. I did everything possible to learn this technique. Through it I did not intend to seek superhuman "powers" but to learn a process of internalization and ascent of consciousness to arrive at the reality beyond the mind.

This is what I try to summarize to those who ask me about *Kriya Yoga*. If asked, I explain that I am not concerned with what exists beyond physical reality as I think no one knows for sure. I believe that there must be a reality greater than what each of us can intuit with our own imagination. This reality is a Universal Intelligence superior to our little mind and is present beneath everything that life is made of. Well, I follow the spiritual path to tune in to this Intelligence.

My research is also accompanied by accepting the condition of human life. I see how hard and terrible and cruel life can be. From this the desire to enter a dimension of living that is not the common one originated in me.

Well, if I believe that the person who asks me about undertaking *Kriya* has not yet been born in the spiritual dimension but sincerely aspires to it, I give a simple piece of advice. "Practice the two techniques *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama* and *Ujjayi Pranayama* regularly for three months. This takes 10/15 minutes, no more is needed. Try to feel if this procedure works, in the sense that you enjoy the practice, you feel good and intend to continue."

Well, if this person doesn't feel anything after the practice and can't even maintain a regular practice, then I just hope that this person doesn't come back to me with more questions to avoid telling him that *Kriya* is not for him.

If, on the other hand, my advice works, then I recommend to learn *Kriya* calmly as an autodidact and, if he deems it appropriate, I advise to study the instructions contained in chapters 6 and 7 of this book and put them into practice. So I propose to use my instructions as a stepping stone to a more advanced meditation practice, personalizing it as much as possible. Indeed, I would like everyone to become capable of walking alone.

I explain that part of maturing and becoming an adult is trusting your own intelligence and then making the right decisions for yourself. I believe that everyone can become able to stand and walk along the spiritual path with the strength of their legs. The right approach is to abandon all religious ideas but still remain on the path of the Divine. We can all become a Light for ourselves.

I advise to practice *Kriya Pranayama* possibly with the three accompanying techniques explained in chapter 7 and above all to conclude each practice with *mental Pranayama*. I recommend just one practice a day and slightly modifying the routine over the course of the days by experimenting variously to figure out what works best. I explain that meditation is an individual affair. Some guys are comfortable with some practices, some are not. If then one wants to integrate this practice with other meditative practices (Buddhist, Chinese, Tibetan or similar) do it quietly, without problems.

Since I started my practice I have never stopped, just one day to experience some small changes. Many times I have gone forward, others backwards, but I have never abandoned the practice. I know that unfortunately some people keep banging their heads against the wall,

trying to get something out of some organization's rigidly explained way of meditating and it has been going on for decades. But if the results aren't there, how can you not understand that there must be something wrong with your way of following these teachings?

I explain that to receive a beneficial effect from the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* it is necessary to work patiently and regularly remembering that the results do not appear only through an impeccable execution of the *Kriya* "magic recipe". Those who apply the instructions they have received in their own way need only enjoy the practice as it naturally reveals itself to them. Excessive expectations are a screen that prevents the genuine beauty of *Kriya* from entering one's life.

As regards the effects of this practice in daily life, one will realize how *Kriya* changes the perception of Reality. Some discover an almost forgotten potential for aesthetic enjoyment (as if they had eyes and a heart for the first time); others will be deeply touched by the significance of their family, the value of a lifelong friendship and will be surprised by the intensity of the loving response that comes from their hearts.

Over time one can see the Divine in everything, find joy in every activity. It may also happen that one has the experience of a sudden, unexpected rise of energy through the spine and this will characterize the encounter with spiritual reality.

CONCEPT OF CLEAN SPIRITUAL PATH

We now come to deal with a particularly delicate point: wrong attitudes towards the spiritual path. This is a more serious problem than is commonly perceived. It must be said that even those born into the spiritual life can forget it and go back to wasting time and energy in an intense purely mental activity.

Do we really think that *kriyabans* who faithfully stick to a regular meditation practice program are free from improbable, totally irrational expectations that contradict the very foundations of the mystical path? It's hard to admit, but the mind, the same mind that takes us to the spiritual path, is also the enemy that constantly tries to ruin everything.

The psychological fragility of many spiritual seekers is truly evident. Unfortunately, the mind, so acute in science and technology, is quick to take the wildest expectations as possible when it approaches the mystical path.

So even those born into the spiritual life can carry on an erroneous attitude that impoverishes all their practice and prevents any progress.

Let's make one thing clear: *Kriya* is only a spiritual practice neither more

nor less different from that of various mystical paths. It has been advertised in such a way as to make one believe that it is a "scientific" practice in the modern sense of the word, ignoring the true meaning of "science."

Science is based on objective facts that can be verified with a zero failure rate. In other words, science is guaranteed to produce results. The results of *Kriya* practice, on the other hand, depend on a "grace" that comes from a reality that is located beyond our mind. Therefore, while someone can practice the "scientific" technique of *Kriya* all his life and get nothing in return, other people instead will get immediate results even with a small and simple practice.

The path of *Kriya Yoga* should always be kept "clean" otherwise failure will occur and all the effort expended in it will be reduced to a colossal waste of time. "Clean" means: firmly aimed at surrender to the Divine and not polluted by the fantasies of the mind.

Even if one has done all that human folly can conceive and wasted years in depleting one's vital energy in obsessively pursuing the maintenance of one's convenience, now, having known the inexplicable dimension of the spirit, that person must make up his mind to move on.

What is expected from those who practice *Kriya* is to possess a certain degree of control over the mind, an adequate power of concentration and a minimal ability to visualize. Other "powers", qualities, knowledge are not necessary. By working only with these tools, the practitioner will experience an intense joy that will grow over time.

To make the reader understand what a "clean" spiritual path is, I will give some examples of what a "polluted" spiritual path is.

SOME ILLUSORY WAYS OF FOLLOWING THE SPIRITUAL PATH

[1] *First massive illusion: the belief that it is necessary to "grow" on a psychological level*

There are people who believe that it is necessary to help the practice of *Kriya* by working hard to supplement their personal growth. Sometimes this happens when they want to follow certain mental procedures related to Buddhism.

Someone claims with satisfaction: "I am following a path of personal growth! " They do not accept to trust the transformation that *Kriya* creates. They often judge themselves with excessive severity and cultivate feelings of guilt. In other words, they want, before practicing *Kriya*, to become "good devotees". Unfortunately in doing so they will never seriously begin the spiritual path as they will never feel that they are ready.

Accept who you are. Do not think that by working hard through self-discipline and striving to improve yourself as a human being, you can destroy the roots of iniquity and selfishness in your consciousness.

Kriya Pranayama techniques do not need to be coupled with psychological work. With pure mental work you will not be "redeemed" by your human nature. Enjoy *Pranayama* by living in the simplicity of *Lahiri's* promise "*Banat, banat, ban jay!*" "*Doing and doing, one day: done!*"

[2] *Second illusion: practicing Kriya with the hope of freeing oneself from serious psychological disorders*

It happens to meet people who have some serious mental disorder and intend to practice *Kriya* hoping to get well. One quickly realizes that there is rarely a genuine spiritual interest in them.

Taking the path of *Kriya* to get rid of depression or other common forms of neurosis is a choice that almost always leads nowhere. Misleading advertising encouraged many to believe that this was possible. But in the spiritual path the results are obtained when a person, in good mental condition, puts a sincere involvement.

If one has a mental disorder and, after experimenting with various alternative remedies, follows the advice of an overly enthusiastic friend and decides to test the *Kriya* path too, he will almost certainly get nothing! Not only that: if, through this process, something good begins to manifest itself in the person, he will not even notice it and will continue to perceive only his problems. Unfortunately, in this situation one cannot feel love but only curiosity for *Kriya*. He will subconsciously be afraid of being disappointed and this will surely happen.

Kriya can work even if you are not a "religious" person, but *Kriya* should be the object of your enthusiasm and aspiration. When a person suffers from neurosis, he generally fails to feel genuine devotion. One cannot look at *Kriya* with suspicion: "Does it really work"? No human being will ever be able to touch the supreme Good of *Kriya* unless he places it, with human and sincere trust, in the ideal area of the sacred.

[3] *Third illusion: Expanding the Potential of the Mind*

This is an illusion, let me tell you, deadly. In the past, I was invited by a local cultural institution to lecture on the history of the cultural movement we now call *New Age*.

This commitment helped to free me from various esoteric-magical conditioning. To prepare for these lessons, I had to reflect on where the line between genuine mystical research and the cultivation of magical

ambitions lay. I realized the suggestibility and vulnerability of the human psyche especially as it approaches the spiritual path.

This was a peaceful time in my life: I felt gratified to have the time and opportunity to study the best essays and textbooks available – I mean books written by academics who didn't belong (or were smart enough to hide their belonging or affiliation) to any particular mystical school and thus manifested a detached attitude towards this matter.

I also greatly appreciated those texts which were capable of presenting the essence of those mystical movements which had flourished around the great religions.

From the very first lesson, I tried to communicate what is usually expressed with the word "mystical". I stressed that even if in some context the term "Mystic" evokes a relationship with the mystery, with the concept of initiation (from the Greek μυστικός [mustikos] – initiated) into secret religious rituals (from the Greek μύω, to hide), a mystic is the one who sincerely tries (by adopting any form of mental or physical discipline) to surrender, with the utmost sense of respect, to *something* that exists beyond the territories of the thinking process and is the essence of perfect fulfillment – unattainable by the acrobatics of our never satisfied mind.

The problem was that this "*something*" beyond the mind was not understandable, it did not create attraction for most of my listeners. In fact, speaking privately with them, I understood that they were cultivating the most surprising illusions. Unfortunately, I realized that most of them had come to my classes to receive fuel and support for third illusions. Despite all my explanations, they did not understand what a mystical path really is and they had no idea what boundless joy can come from practicing a "clean" spiritual path.

One day, after talking to one of them, I felt a sense of discouragement and I felt the need to walk in the fresh air. The feeling of alienation seemed to stretch to the horizon and touch the edge of the sky. I had a thought, bright and full of warmth: even if the people I was associating with were not attracted by the ideals of the great saints of the past, and rather they nourished the instinct to corrupt any sacred and liberating teaching, I would still have remained firm in my path not because I had faith in one day getting good effects from it, but because it had already given me something incomparable. I didn't need to look for reasons: it was the radiance of my memory that saved me every time, every day.

[4] *Fourth illusion: mixing Kriya with "New Age" therapies*

Meeting a *New Age* group of *kriyabans* was like meeting a family a little larger and less dogmatic than my first *Kriya* group who strictly followed

PY's teachings. I remember this particular period of my life whenever I happen to listen to the recordings of devotional songs that I bought back then. I used to fall in love with an Indian *Bhajan* and chant it inside me all day long. For me it was like food; I really felt like I was eating that music.

Sometimes I was unable to understand their clumsy attempt to respect an oriental way of life. Their behavior was characterized by innocent manias.

The new group combined *Kriya* practice with some "cathartic" techniques (which created a process of purification). Their intention was to produce a cleansing effect on their psyche by bringing any repressed material to the light of consciousness. They explained – and this idea is not absurd – that by removing the inner blocks, the evolutionary process of *Kriya* would be easier.

While their efforts in practicing the *Kriya* techniques were not remarkable, they tried by every external means (readings, devotional songs, workshops ...) to extract from the depths of their psyche any trace of religious attitude, any residue of spiritual aspiration. I can't say for sure if some of them were born to spiritual reality. I have not been able to understand it.

Searching for alternative medicines, group therapies directed by eccentric individuals with no academic training, were expensive distractions to add to *Kriya*.

I was struck by the tendency to spend a lot of money on training seminars focusing on strange therapeutic methods such as aromatherapy, crystal therapy, chromotherapy... When I dared to question the validity of the whole thing they felt annoyed. They told me there was no reason to be perplexed about their practices without trying them.

They commented, "It is our *Karma* that is giving us the best of all opportunities to grow in all fields. We should respond positively. We must not oppose this beneficial current, otherwise we may ... have to be reborn on this physical plane. just to fully experience this opportunity!" "Our *Kriya* practice will receive a great benefit because *Kriya* is practiced with the energy present in the body and is recharged by the flow of the *Universal Energy*."

They were convinced that all their research, all their expensive activities could make their spiritual path as easy as a walk.

My relationship with those researchers was based on true affection and never came to disagreement, bitterness or empty formality. Those friends were always generous to me and respectful of my personality. They passionately shared everything they had learned, no matter if it cost them so much money, and they never insisted on imposing anything on me.

I considered their activities as a colossal waste of time but I did not have the courage to say this to them.

Too much insistence on the cleaning process is like preparing your home to receive a distinguished guest; cleaning it continuously and decorating it, delighted by a rapt awareness of all that the house grants – in the meantime, after repeatedly ringing the bell, the expected guest is neglected on the doormat ...

Several years have passed, some friends are still there, to get... the full cleansing of their subconscious mind. The work in the field of *Kriya* is totally forgotten, reduced to nothing.

[5] *Fifth illusion: frantically search for a technique higher than Kriya*

There are people who do not engage deeply with the technique of *Kriya* and, after following it for some time, neglect it seeking a technique of spiritual evolution superior to *Kriya*. In fact, they are convinced that centuries ago there was a "superior" technique taught to very few particularly advanced people.

A friend who was interested in *Kriya* told me that he had studied some of the so-called "masterpieces" of esoteric literature and recommended me to read them. I agreed to read what he lent me. I entered an almost hypnotic state and did not immediately realize that every chain of ideas contained in these texts had no basis, but was only the brainchild of the author's unbridled imagination. Through a profusion of intoxicating words, the author had dared to develop his ideas, free from the relationship with reality and the rules of logic. Everything was just a mental pastime.

One day this friend met a self-appointed expert in occult matters who claimed to know the secrets of an almost extinct esoteric path and, in particular, a spiritual technique practiced millennia ago by a few highly evolved beings. This "expert" told him: "Now that humanity is more and more materialistic, such teachings are not revealed to anyone" then after a pause and with a sigh, he finally concluded: "Today's students would not know how to appreciate such secrets. and, in their hands, they could be dangerous."

The expert gave the impression of being a dreamer, but he was not as naive as he seemed. He used fascinating terminology similar to that of the *Kabbalah* and also spoke effortlessly of the original Christianity, whose texts (canonical and apocryphal) he was able to interpret in an unconventional way.

My friend tried to introduce himself to him as a true adept, disclosing that he was willing to accept any request, as long as this extraordinary secret was revealed to him. The clever expert, after having expressed some reservations, finally pretended to capitulate and

murmured: "Then it's okay, but only for you, just because I feel I'm being *guided* to make an exception."

Then my friend, poor victim trembling with emotion, lived the best moment of his life, convinced that the meeting with the expert had been decided in the "high places." The donation to be offered during the initiation – combined with the promise to keep absolute secrecy – it was remarkable, it had to represent the great value attached to that event. The teacher obviously stated that this donation would be transferred to a monk who helped maintain an orphanage. (It's a true classic! ... there's always an orphanage in the middle of these stories!)

While my friend, completely satisfied, was preparing to receive a gift ... incomparable (he received the explanation convinced that it was a gift and that nothing could adequately compensate for the blessings this gift would bring in his life) the rascal decided absently what kind of technique he would explain during the initiation, illustrating it with dazzling solemnity. My friend received it all and spent two days in a state of pure fervor.

Later, imprisoned in his chimera, he saw the rekindling of his passion and the comedy was repeated. He learned of other incomparable "revelations". This illusion is, in fact, invincible. After receiving his "drug", he continued his inexorable journey towards the abyss. Who knows if, one day, he will realize that the techniques he had paid a fortune for were taken from some books and altered, so that he cannot guess their origin.

[6] *Sixth illusion: faith in Baraka*

The belief that the power (*Baraka*) of the great Masters of the past is still present in their descendants as a non-stop chain is quite common. I met a *kriyaban* who was convinced that spiritual progress could not happen except through the reception of this "power". He told me that in his life he received multiple *Kriya* initiations from those who claimed to have a valid lineage, although the teachings he received added nothing to what he already knew. He was enchanted by the idea of "transmission of power". That power already had within it the ability to redeem.

He did not give much importance to the practice of *Kriya* techniques – he said that they only served to purify himself before receiving the real "initiation" which for him meant "power". He was convinced that "lineage" was the most important factor to look out for while approaching a spiritual teacher

He talked a lot about the importance of following moral rules [Patanjali's *Yama* and *Niyama*.] The phases of *Pranayama* and *Pratyahara* which were my alpha and omega, were nothing for him without *Yama* and *Niyama*. He behaved very cordially to me but when he spoke to me of the absolute

place he gave to the moral rules listed by Patanjali he managed to make me feel like a worm. He criticized my obsession with perfecting the practice of *Kriya*. He explained that the very desire to master a meditation technique meant cultivating a desire and this was against the principles of Buddhism.

Over time, I realized that this way of following moral rules was a farce, with no level of depth and understanding of human nature.

[7] *Seventh illusion: belief of being already enlightened*

Those interested in practicing the path of *Kriya Yoga* know that serious daily discipline awaits them.

Let us focus our attention on people who became spontaneously "Enlightened" (or rather self-realized, freed from ignorance, having received enlightenment from their inner self.) Think for example of the sage *Ramana Maharshi*. Everyone is free to try to follow what *Ramana Maharshi* advised to do or to keep asking the question: "Who am I?" Reading books about his history can undoubtedly inspire us. I believe that this discipline is valid but only for spiritually evolved people and these persons are very rare.

I tried to confront the question posed by *Ramana Maharshi*. I gave myself a beautiful and poetic answer, I experienced a sense of liberation, but nothing changed in my life. The fact is that we cannot imitate such a sage by pretending to be "*Enlightened*."

I understand that my path is to follow a discipline that requires psycho-physical effort and not simply an exercise in mental acrobatics. That is why I practice the discipline of breathing which is called *Pranayama*.

I am perplexed by those who have decided to walk the *Jnani* path by doing pure mental work by convincing themselves that they are like *Ramana Maharshi*: the mind is very good at nurturing this illusion.

I met a person who once practiced *Kriya*, and then, with a mechanism similar to self-hypnosis, he was convinced that he was already free from *Maya* and that therefore any other discipline was no longer necessary.

It's bad to say but it came spontaneously the image of a person enjoying a beautiful day lying on an inflatable mattress floating above a lake of manure comes naturally to me. The miasma of the fetid substance that supports the mattress gives off a revolting smell. But the person looks at the sky and dreams of being in the sky, immersed in a pure dimension of light. It is enough to hold his nose to ignore the stench that surrounds him.

When these people think, "I am *Maya* free" they are not telling a lie. We are actually potentially Divine! But it is also true that when they state it openly, at that precise moment they should feel that "potentially" is one

thing and "reality" quite another thing.

In their philosophical view, we *kriyabans* are in a state of illusion. Our destiny is to work and fight all our life without achieving anything.

One day I felt inclined to argue with one of these people and carry on the discussion till I drop. I saw how his mind was capable of destroying, impoverishing everything I had always loved in life. I was just trying to tune in to his reasoning but his way of thinking only succeeded in bringing me into a state of alienation. When this person tried to demonstrate to me the state of *Samadhi*, looking at his wide open eyes staring into the void I realized that I was facing a person suffering from mental problems.

[8] *Eight illusion: consider oneself radically inferior to other people*

Some people have no confidence in themselves and consider themselves, from a spiritual point of view, radically inferior to other people who believe they are now free from all illusions, spiritually "enlightened. "

This happened in the life of a dear *kriyaban* friend older than me, worthy of the utmost respect, who had embarked on the path of *Kriya* many years earlier. We dated in the final part of his life. He lived alone and my heart sank when I couldn't visit him for months. I met him for short afternoons when we walked around talking quietly. I write this line with a pain in my heart as I have never met a kind and selfless person like him.

I witnessed an inexorable process that led him to believe that his spiritual goal was for him to live, in a future incarnation, next to a "divine being" who for him was the living example of perfection. He told me that when he was young he had met only once the woman who was at the head of the *Kriya* organization founded by PY. Well, he told me that success in *Kriya* meant for him receiving a benign look of love and approval from that person! I tried to convince him that deifying any inspiring figure could be the end of his spiritual adventure.

He was discouraged because he had seen God in that person, but he did not have the courage to see God within himself. The problem was that this way of thinking ended up corrupting the innocence of his spiritual disposition.

He expressed what, years before, he would not even have dared to think: the alleged evolution of the individual, achieved through *Kriya*, was undeniable, but so slow, as to be practically insignificant. The *Kriya* technique was, for him, like a religious rite that had to be carried out scrupulously, but only to demonstrate one's loyalty to this spiritual path.

He had fatally accepted the idea that on this planet there were special people, Self-realized, forever free from *Maya*, while, on the other hand, there were irreparably common people who would have to wait who

knows how many incarnations to get a glimpse of lighting. Unfortunately, that vision supported the plot on which he had continued to weave his thinking.

One day he vented all his melancholy. Considering how superficially — so he said — he had practiced the techniques of meditation, he had no doubts that, in this life, he would certainly have missed the "goal". He already dreamed of future incarnations where he would practice within an *ashram* near a Self-realized Master. He had already devoted his heart to this ideal destiny.

I felt a gigantic wave of inexplicable nostalgia, which was ready to overwhelm me, but which remained held, as if suspended, all around us. Today that he is gone, I wonder if the intuition of the transforming value of *Kriya*, an intuition that enlightened and sustained the first years of his path, was gradually erased from his mind due to the human tendency to emphasize (and support with an avalanche of anecdotes) the greatness of certain people who were "impudently" holy, perfect, majestic. My friend had made the tragic mistake of believing that the eternal spiritual Source at the center of his being would wither if he were condemned to live far from a divine being, similar to the one towards which he had directed the ardent expectations of his heart.

CHAPTER 10 [SECOND PART]

PRACTICAL COUNSELS

Premise on hypothetical dangers of meditation

Browsing the net often you will find notices that warn us against any form of meditation. There are reports of disconnection with reality with extreme strengthening of emotions, in particular agitation and distress, long-term disorientation where one is made unable to concentrate long enough to be able to do any work.

As for the hypothetical "premature awakening of *Kundalini*", the problems it could cause would have no limits.

We read that: "... an aspirant can develop occult powers. These powers can be used for constructive or destructive purposes, but very often they are misused. For example, the ability to read another person's mind can create problems and it is likely that those on whom this power is used ... will resent. " This is really funny! When we find such nonsense we wonder who ever wrote such amenities.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency on the Internet to copy pages and bring them back to other sites without even changing a comma. If one invents that a yogi died of self-combustion during the practice of *Pranayama*, he will be able to verify that this news will appear after a couple of months on different web sites.

We read that *Yogis*, sooner or later, will get involved.... in witchcraft and black magic since they evoke, although unaware, negative entities. One author explained that: "When you repeat the *Mantra Om, Om* ... you are invoking a demonic spirit that comes to take possession of your mind." He added his testimony: "During a meditation session I began to levitate. From that second on I could no longer sleep like a human being; lost sleep! Whenever I closed my eyes, I saw the flames of Hell, I didn't dare close my eyes, I couldn't! I became a psychiatric case, and was hospitalized 26 times." I'm sorry for this poor fellow who obviously had serious mental health problems!

My experience of hearing such complaints was not without conflict. I went through some very bitter moments when I met people who told me that *Kriya* was responsible for all their psychological problems (perhaps they meant psychiatric) as well as some physical ailments.

I should have believed that simply by breathing and focusing the mind on the spine and on particular centers in the spine, they had developed various mental and physical ailments. From a blessing as it

seemed at the beginning, *Kriya* in their specific case turned out to be a serious misfortune! Those same techniques that I had experimented several times, with so much love, obtaining the purest of delights had been a disaster for them.

My reaction was this: "But how, with what spirit, with what expectations, these people faced *Kriya Yoga*? They tell me that it leads to madness ... well if the germs of madness are inside me, they will blossom both if I practice *Kriya* and otherwise. Thinking back to the glorious moments I experienced, I will walk this path without a minimum of fear, even if I should burn myself in it. "

What then should I say to those people who do not talk about the various drugs they have been using for years! A friend told me that after practicing some simple meditation techniques (something very mild such as awareness of the breath or concentration on the *Chakras*) he lost his mental balance and experienced intense attacks of anguish and terror. He made a big fuss with his complaints for example by writing on a forum dedicated to the practice of *Yoga*.

I had a strong suspicion about this friend. Why did he go to India every year, for a long series of years, without ever showing any interest in *Yoga* or Indian spirituality? I thought that maybe he was going there to get different kinds of drugs at low prices. I learned that for years he made use not only of opiates but also of acids, of all sorts of amphetamines and (emulating Carlo Castaneda) he had not denied the use of psychotropic plants. It was evident that by complaining in front of me, he was trying to exorcise the terrible suspicion that he had seriously damaged his own brain and that he was in a condition of permanent, fatal psychic disorder. He removed the hypothesis that his unfortunate past choices could be causally related to his present mental situation.

I often think about how shocking it would be to have a magic mirror where you could see a summary of your past actions and realize how reckless and cruel we have been to our bodies! I understand that in some cases a preexisting mental disorder may prompt a person to seek drugs as a remedy. Well, in such cases I do not believe that the use of *Yoga* techniques can aggravate the condition of the state of alienation.

WHAT TO DO TO FACE NEGATIVE STATES DURING KRIYA PRACTICE

Let us face an authentic fact that has a lot to teach us. Let us consider the experience of *Gopi Krishna*. His key book is: *Kundalini: Evolutionary Energy in Man* – it is also published under the title *Living with Kundalini*.

This book contains a clear and concise autobiographical account of the *Kundalini* awakening phenomenon. *Gopi Krishna* experienced such an

awakening in 1937, although he did not have a spiritual teacher and was not initiated into any spiritual lineage. His excellent testimony was written in 1967. *Gopi Krishna's* existence was blessed with states of bliss but also plagued by physical and mental distress.

His main practice had been to visualize "an imaginary Lotus in full bloom, radiating light" located on top of his head. One day, as he sat meditating – exactly as he had done for three hours before dawn, every day for seventeen years – he became aware of a powerful, pleasant sensation at the base of his spine. He continued to meditate; the sensation began to spread and extend upward. It continued to expand until he heard, almost without warning, a roar like that of a waterfall and felt a stream of liquid light enter his brain.

Suddenly, with a roar like that of a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal cord. Entirely unprepared for such a development, I was completely taken by surprise; but regaining self-control instantaneously, I remained sitting in the same posture, keeping my mind on the point of concentration. The illumination grew brighter and brighter, the roaring louder, I experienced a rocking sensation and then felt myself slipping out of my body, entirely enveloped in a halo of light. (*Gopi Krishna Living With Kundalini*).

This experience radically changed the pattern of his life. He experienced a continuous "luminous glow" around his head and began to have a variety of psychological and physiological problems. Sometimes he thought he was going crazy. He adopted a very strict diet and, for years, refused to do any more concentration exercises.

The keen desire to sit and meditate, which had always been present during the preceding days, disappeared suddenly and was replaced by a feeling of horror of the supernatural. I wanted to fly from even the thought of it. At the same time I felt a sudden distaste for work and conversation, with the inevitable result that being left with nothing to keep myself engaged, time hung heavily on me, adding to the already distraught condition of my mind. [...] Each morning heralded for me a new kind of terror, a fresh complication in the already disordered system, a deeper fit of melancholy or more irritable condition of the mind which I had to restrain, to prevent it from completely overwhelming me, by keeping myself alert, usually after a completely sleepless night; and after withstanding patiently the tortures of the day, I had to prepare myself for even worse torment of the night.

But let's read how he emerged from this negative experience and learn about a wonderful state of spiritual awakening that blessed him for the rest of his life. He had read in the esoteric texts that there were a number of

simple practices that could serve to bring the energy back into balance in his body. Its main remedy is very reminiscent of the practice of *Kriya Pranayama*.

.... a fearful idea struck me. Could it be that I had aroused *Kundalini* through *Pingala* or the solar nerve which regulates the flow of heat in the body and is located on the right side of *Sushumna*? If so, I was doomed, I thought desperately and as if by divine dispensation the idea flashed across my brain to make a last-minute attempt to rouse *Ida*, or the lunar nerve on the left side, to activity, thus neutralizing the dreadful burning effect of the devouring fire within. With my mind reeling and senses deadened with pain, but with all the will-power left at my command, I brought my attention to bear on the left side of the seat of *Kundalini*, and tried to force an imaginary cold current upward through the middle of the spinal cord. In that extraordinarily extended, agonized, and exhausted state of consciousness, I distinctly felt the location of the nerve and strained hard mentally to divert its flow into the central channel. Then, as if waiting for the destined moment, a miracle happened. There was a sound like a nerve thread snapping and instantaneously a silvery streak passed zigzag through the spinal cord, exactly like the sinuous movement of a white serpent in rapid flight, pouring an effulgent, cascading shower of brilliant vital energy into my brain, filling my head with a blissful lustre in place of the flame that had been tormenting me for the last three hours. Completely taken by surprise at this sudden transformation of the fiery current, darting across the entire network of my nerves only a moment before, and overjoyed at the cessation of pain, I remained absolutely quiet and motionless for some time, tasting the bliss of relief with a mind flooded with emotion, unable to believe I was really free of the horror. Tortured and exhausted almost to the point of collapse by the agony I had suffered during the terrible interval. I immediately fell asleep, bathed in light and for the first time after weeks of anguish felt the sweet embrace of restful sleep.

Very interesting therefore is the way described by which *Gopi Krishna* set in motion a healing process. Convinced that he had raised *Kundalini* through *Pingala*, he attempted, and succeeded, to set *Ida* in motion, thus neutralizing the inner fire that was devouring him. He made a precise decision and kept repeating it with ferocious determination: he mentally created a cold current that rose within the central channel of the spine. This was enough to save him!

From that point forward, *Gopi Krishna* believed that this practice had put a healing process in motion. He wrote about mystical experience and the evolution of consciousness from a scientific point of view. He theorized that there was a biological mechanism in the human body, *Kundalini*, responsible for creativity, genius, mystical experience. He

understood that *Kundalini* is the true cause of evolution. Of course, only a balanced method could set in motion a healthy *Kundalini* awakening.

In conclusion, what we can learn from the experience of *Gopi Krishna* is that a routine which is totally based on strong concentration in the *Sahasrara* is not appropriate for most people. Building a strong magnet in the *Sahasrara* leads you to experience moments of panic or moments when you feel disconnected from reality. If you are a beginner, forget about the techniques in which you focus for a long time on the fontanel or above it. We are all very grateful to the AYP site where the reasons for what we are saying are clearly explained.

Another interesting testimony on the awakening of *Kundalini* is that of *B. S. Goel* (1935-1998) described in his: *Psychoanalysis and Meditation*. He was truly a person without equal. His experience of *Kundalini* awakening at the age of 28 was quite dramatic. *Kundalini* awoke by itself. His friends thought he was "losing his mind" during this long process. He traveled every corner of India to look for someone who could explain what was happening to him. Many people could not help but quote and comment on various theories. They practically knew nothing. The uniqueness of this person lies in his experience of classical psychoanalysis combined with the meditation of which he was a keen advocate.

When he was 35, his *Guru* appeared to him in a dream, and told him that Psychoanalysis and Marxism, which he had believed, were false paths that did not have the power to lead him to happiness. He also told him that the only path to inner peace and joy was to go through the search for the Divine. In 1982, he opened an *Ashram* in the Himalayas to help and guide other aspirants who had had *Kundalini* experiences.

What interests us is that *Goel* talks in detail about the different degrees of suffering he went through as his ego was destroyed and rebuilt. He is the only one, apart from the late *Swami Satyananda Saraswati*, to study the role of the *Bindu* (spiritual center located at the back of the head where the hairline forms a kind of vortex). He explained that "when consciousness marches to *Bindu* (which he calls *Brahma-randhra*), the ego formations will be exposed to consciousness in free-association, in improvised writings, in dreams and above all, in meditation itself.

In the last part of the book, discussing the "signs that indicate the approach of the final goal", among a set of signs, he had the courage to mention one in particular that is not usually dealt with in books – apart from those books that want to be ironic on the whole "*Guru*" thing. He relates "the great desire to be pierced and penetrated." As for "pierced", he exemplifies it as the desire to put a fingernail in the halfway point between the two eyebrows. As for "penetrated" he clarifies that the desire for

penetration to the *Bindu* can, due to the ignorance that comes from the ego, to become the "desire for passive anal penetration." He makes it clear that a common sexual act cannot satisfy the person who really needs to be penetrated into the *Bindu* to find the ultimate spiritual bliss. He adds that: "until it reaches that stage, the yogi can often indulge in compulsive homosexuality." "It is likely that many saints of all ages would have remained great homosexuals had they stayed in their previous to holiness period."

Let us now try to conceive a wise behavior to be adopted promptly when, after *Kriya* practice, we encounter unpleasant or negative or disturbing moods.

First of all we remember that a student who wants to be successful in *Kriya* as a self-taught person must be aware of the principles underlying the human psyche. For example, it is important that you know the principle of unconscious resistance to the methods that produce a strong internal cleansing process such as those foreseen in *Kriya Yoga*. He should understand the reasons for the alternating moods that appear when practicing *Kriya* techniques intensely. He should not be alarmed by encountering phenomena that come and go but should build a solid state of calm and mental silence. The *kriyabans* who best overcome any problem are those who have studied depth psychology.

Kriya is a spiritual path, nothing else, but its procedures can touch the unconscious sphere. Even if one practices in the best way, he can experience negative moods such as depression, unmotivated fear, anxiety ... Despite being close to a glorious experience, a *kriyaban* can feel overwhelmed by an unknown power and have a panic attack. What then is the best way to regain lost tranquility?

[1] *Nadi Sodhana possibly followed by Sitali*

Surely you know the *Nadi Sodhana* technique. Practice it every day, even several times a day.

The balancing effects of *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama* relate to the currents of *Ida* and *Pingala* and are almost immediate to perceive. It is explained that the *Ida* current (of a female nature, linked to introversion and the state of rest) flows vertically along the left side of the spinal column, while the *Pingala* current (of a male nature linked to extroversion and physical activity) flows parallel to *Ida* on the right side. *Sushumna* flows in the middle and represents the ideal state to be obtained before entering the state of "*meditation*." An imbalance between *Ida* and *Pingala* is

responsible for the lack of harmony between introversion and extroversion. When *Ida* exceeds in functioning we have an excess of introversion, when *Pingala* predominates we have an excess of extroversion.

There are times when we feel more externalized; others in which we are more internalized. In a healthy person, this alternation is characterized by the balance between a life of positive relationships with the outside world and a serene contact with one's inner life. The too introverted person tends to lose contact with external reality. The consequence is that the vicissitudes of life seem to join forces against him and this undermines the sense of control, of mastery of the facts of life. The too extroverted person betrays fragility in dealing with what arises from the subconscious realm and may find himself having to face unexpected moments of anguish. The exercise that we now illustrate favors a balance between the tendency to introversion and the tendency to extroversion.

For the problems we are dealing with, add *Sitali Pranayama*. (I remember that creating a feeling of coolness rising through the spine was exactly what *Gopi Krishna* did to get out of his terrible situation.)

To practice *Sitali*, sit with the spine straight and concentrate all mental strength at the point between the eyebrows. Use all your imagination to raise a fresh current within your spine. Breathe in through your mouth while holding your tongue in a particular way. Lift the edges of your tongue to form a "U" and let it protrude beyond your lips. Inhale deeply through your tongue and mouth. Feel a fresh sensation in the mouth, transfer it to the spine. Exhale through the nose, ideally directing the breath to all parts of the body. Repeat at least 12 times

[2] *Intense practice of Mula Bandha for 108 repetitions*

Forget the breath altogether, try to tune into the calm at the point between the eyebrows. Quietly but intensely practice 108 *Mula Bandha*. Contract the muscles at the base of the spine, hold the contraction for a couple of seconds and relax. Repeat ... Don't rush: each contraction and relaxation should last at least four seconds. You can, if it suits you, do several short sessions until you complete the 108 repetitions. The beneficial effect of this practice is almost immediate.

Note

In classical *Yoga* the three fundamental *Bandhas* are:

Mula Bandha: Contract the muscles at the base of the spine

Uddiyana Bandha: draws the abdominal muscles internally by contracting them

Jalandhara Bandha: Lower the chin to the chest

In the initial part of the *Kriya* path, the *yogi* has only an approximate understanding of the *Bandhas*, later he will come to a complete mastery of them

and will be able to use them, with slight adaptations, in many *Kriya* techniques. Here we have introduced the *Maha Bandha* as it creates a sense of energetic current, an almost ecstatic internal thrill that moves up the spine. A positive mood is thus favored.

[3] *Completion of Mula Bandha with Japa rotating in Kutastha*

We know how important the practice of *Japa* is. It calms the mind.

Inhale and then create a particular pause after inhaling. During this pause mentally chant the *Mantra* of your choice. Feel that this *Mantra* is something that rotates in the sphere of *Kutastha*.

What does "something that rotates" mean? You have surely seen those acrobats running their motorcycles within a metal sphere – which is a few meters in diameter. They move along the inside of the sphere in all directions. Well, pretend that your *Kutastha* is a sphere within which you rotate your *Mantra*. (More slowly, of course.) Do this until you feel a strong presence sensation in the center between the eyebrows. A good choice is to repeat some of these breaths.

Warning: avoid long concentration in the Sahasrara

We have remembered that a routine that is totally based on strong concentration in the *Sahasrara* is not appropriate for most people who are taking their first steps on the spiritual path.

For this reason we have explained that this form of concentration can be used only after having practiced 48 *Kriya* breaths. This practice stimulates the awakening of *Kundalini*. This implies acting on our Unconscious bringing into the sphere of our consciousness some contents that we are not able to assimilate. The person experiencing all of this, especially if they are far from emotional maturity, could experience a whole range of negative moods.

Except for *Kutastha*, *Anahata* and *Manipura*, be very careful with the techniques that affect only one *Chakra*. If you want to unlock an energetic or psychic knot, remember that a knot (*Granti*) is not like we represent it, that is, like the knot of a rope. It has an interdependence with all the other nodes, they are subtly intertwined, one within the other. If you focus on one knot for a long time, you risk losing your peace of mind. Do not act like a surgeon who sets out to remove a gallstone stuck in an organ, without taking all necessary precautions to avoid destroying the organ and killing the patient.

If the result of your practice boils down to a grayish state of your mind, if you have the impression that your soul is 'scratched', this is a sign that you need to add the remedies we have described above. If you do this and live a normal life, your *Yoga* practice will never cause you problems.

CHAPTER 11

THE VALUE OF JAPA

In the previous chapter we reported the complaints of those who, after practicing *Kriya* for years, feel that they have not achieved anything. In this chapter I want to explain how to avert this nightmare for those who are willing to make a sacrifice to get valid results out of their practice. For this reason I will deal with the topic of *Japa*.

Japa (*Devotional Prayer, Inner Prayer*) especially if it becomes continuous and is supported by the practice of the "*Presence of the Divine*" is a wonderful spiritual discipline, a complete path in itself. This form of *Prayer* is not a plea to God for the purpose of obtaining something necessary for material existence. Mystics use *Prayer* to affirm their intention to worship and surrender completely to the Divine.

Let's try to understand why in this book dedicated to *Kriya Yoga* I intend to dedicate an entire chapter to *Japa*. The fact is that I know that for someone this tool could be decisive for having a direct experience of spiritual reality. In short: *Japa* will calm the mind to the point of producing the breathless state after *Kriya Pranayama* and therefore marking the entrance into spiritual reality.

In chapter 3 I describe how the idea of practicing *Japa* entered my life. In short, one day I found a book on the life and experiences of *Swami Ramdas* (1884-1963), the Indian saint who moved across India incessantly repeating the *Mantra* "*Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram.*" While I was still struck by the beauty of this book, I received a Catholic rosary as a gift. During a walk in the countryside I decided to use it to repeat this *Mantra*.

I practiced it in a low voice for about 108 repetitions. During my practice I tried to feel the vibration of the *Mantra* in my head and in all parts of my chest. In this repetition I placed all the aspiration of my heart. I completed my walk by letting the effects of this practice stay in my mind.

Well, after a few hours, that evening during my *Kriya* session, I had an experience that changed my life. During *Mental Pranayama* while my awareness lingered on each *Chakra* I perceived that a new state of consciousness was manifesting. My breathing went still, my mind completely quieted down. At some point I realized that I was completely out of breath. This condition lasted several minutes, without feeling any sense of discomfort, or excitement of surprise. I felt a great sense of freedom.

The next day the same experience happened again. I was surprised

that one of the simplest techniques in the world, like *Japa*, had produced such an amazing result! Where my best intentions failed, *Japa* had produced the miracle! In those days I verified a very specific link between the practice of *Japa* and the attainment of the breathless state.

My first reflection was that the effect of *Japa* was to cancel out the "background noise" of the mind. In fact, I realized that the effects of this "noise" constantly ruin our meditation. There are some thoughts that can be visualized, identified and blocked during meditation practice, but a widespread and persistent background noise thwarts any effort to enjoy the main fruit of meditation: the breathless state.

Not being hermits, when we take refuge in our room to practice *Kriya*, we cannot reach the ideal conditions of relaxation in twenty or thirty minutes. It takes longer to completely calm the mind. Therefore, even if the *Kriya* process is carried out with the utmost care, the strength of the background noise becomes an insurmountable obstacle. The only way to undo it is not in the tricks of some technique, but in *Japa*. When we practice *Japa* during the day, then, in the last part of the *Kriya* routine, we find that the background noise of the mind has given way to absolute immobility and transparency: the experience is unexpected. This tool is unique and can truly produce "miracles"!

A mind absorbed in the aspiration towards the Divine through the daily practice of *Japa* becomes capable of performing the greatest of miracles: interrupting the useless "internal dialogue" of the mind, the continuous source of energy expenditure, the main obstacle to reaching the state of meditation.

When the state of *Mental Silence* is reached, spiritual reality manifests naturally, without further effort. If we can't get this complete "silence" we risk dragging our existence forward thinking with admiration about the lives of the saints, resigned to the false idea that mystical experience is fatally precluded to us.

Once the state of *Mental Silence* has been created, the main effect of *Kriya* will take place in our life. By going through all the layers that protect the Ego (thoughts, emotions, sensations ...) the experience of the breathless state will manifest itself. It is very wise therefore to accept the help of *Japa*.

I hope I was clear, I hope you took what I said seriously. I sincerely hope that what has worked for me and some of my friends will work for you as well.

The first part of this chapter will teach you how to practice *Japa*, the second part describes a meditation practice, always related to *Japa*, which is called "*Prayer of the heart*."

How to find your Mantra

Many books introducing the practice of *Japa* insist upon a heap of banalities. Often they are useless essays deprived of any intelligence and passion. For example when I read that the *mala* should be made of this or of that material, or that it should not be seen by others, or that the *Sumeru* bead (where the *mala* begins and ends) should never be crossed [they say that if you want to practice the *mala* twice, you must turn it and make the last bead become the first bead of the second round] I know that these are first-class idiocies. Likewise when I read that the power of the *Prayer* lies not in your effort but in a "Grace" that comes only when you use a particular formula canonized by a traditional pattern of worship, I know that this is another falsehood. Yes there is a "Grace" but this is linked with the fervor you put in your practice.

Therefore choose a *Mantra* (*Prayer*) that appeals to you. Don't feel obliged to use Lahiri Mahasaya's favored *Vasudeva Mantra* ("Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya".) It is true that among different favorite prayers, you could prefer one that has (by adding, if necessary, *Om* or *Amen* at the beginning or at the end) twelve syllables. Twelve is a perfect number because you can utilize it during *Kriya Pranayama*, placing each of its syllables in a different *Chakra*. Various beautiful twelve-syllables *Mantras* can be taken out of spiritual chants or poems. As an example, from the well-known Adi Shankara's chant you can select the beautiful 12-syllable verse: *Chi-da-nan-da-ru-pah-shi-vo-ham-shi-vo-ham* [*That Form which is pure consciousness and bliss, I am that supreme Being!*]

One thing should be stated objectively: YOUR *Mantra* should express or evoke exactly what YOU want to achieve, and embody the attitude you want to express. For example, the attitude of surrender is expressed by *Mantras* beginning with *Om Namo*, other *Mantras* might express the absolute non-dual realization. Sometimes, the meaning is not as important as having in one's heart the example of a saint who used that *Mantra*.

Generally speaking, a good choice is that of a *Mantra* having both a strong and a soft tone. Be sensitive to the vibration that your *Mantra* arouses in your body and heart.

At the start of each session of *Prayer* it is important to feel a surge of passion in your heart. A nun living in a cloister revealed during an interview which Prayer/Mantra she chose: "Thy face, O LORD, will I seek!" Can we feel the surge of deep emotions that such words aroused in her bosom when she chose them (among the Psalms) and which intensity of love she infused in their repetition during all her life?

In literature you will see how beautiful *Mantras* have been built. Here you

have the *Krishna Mantra*: *Om Klim Krishnaya Govindaya Gopi-jana Vallabhaya Swaha*. Here you have the *Shiva Mantra*: *Om Nama Shivaya Sing Vang Kim Am*.

If you study the concept of *Bija Mantra*, you can forge for yourself some good *Mantras*. To a preexisting *Mantra*, after the initial *Om*, your teacher can add some "*Bija*" (seed) *Mantras* like: Aim, Dúm, Gam, Haum, Hoom, Hrim, Hrom, Krim, Shrim, Strim, Vang, ...

These sounds were chosen by ancient *yogis*, who felt their beauty and liked their vibration. They were not given by a divinity, they are a human discovery. These seed *Mantras* have no meaning but can enrich a *Mantra* who has a meaning. Don't choose a *Mantra* only because certain literature extols the power of this or of that *Bija Mantra*. Read your mood, feel your emotions after an intense practice of a certain *Mantra*.

Some make an unfortunate choice, through which they seem to punish themselves. The sentence they have chosen to repeat could have negative tones and emphasize unequivocally their limits and unworthiness. When this happens it is clear that after a short time, their practice of *Japa* falls apart – they find themselves repeating that *Mantra* once or twice during the day, like a sigh of dejection.

How to practice your Mantra

Although Eastern traditions recommend practicing *Japa* mentally, I have no doubt that it should be practiced with the voice – at least for an initial number of one hundred repetitions. Make a decision to complete at least one *Mala* (108-bead rosary) of repetitions in a normal tone of voice.¹

In order not to disturb those around you, you can whisper the *Prayer* while maintaining a minimum of intensity such that you can listen to yourself. At the beginning of the practice try to feel the meaning of the words. Pronounce the syllables with a calm demeanor. Learn to make them resonate in your mouth, chest and various areas of the head.

If you practice walking back and forth in a room, you are likely to have an irresistible urge to put things around you in order. This makes you understand how the repetition of the *Prayer* produces a similar order in your mind as well. In fact, it cleanses your mental substance and puts in order all your "psychological furniture." The practice is like a jackhammer that shatters the concrete of the mind which is made up of the conditioning of the mind: it allows you to cross its quicksand unscathed and reach the

¹ A teacher was adamant about the fact that a *Mantra* should be pronounced only mentally. I tried to follow his counsel but it didn't work. After various months I was fed up with my useless attempt: I dared to chant it vocally on my *Mala*. Before completing my 108 repetitions, a spring of happiness and mirth gushed from my heart.

state of pure awareness.

A great obstacle, for many fatal, is that you may slip into a state of discouragement and have to confront the idea that *Japa* is a mind-numbing practice and therefore that it is better to collaborate with spiritual evolution using more powerful and effective. If this happens, appeal to your moral strength and turn your doubts into a calm euphoria. Strengthen your will. Break the wall of impossibility that life has placed before you. Whatever abyss of mental confusion and spiritual dryness you find yourself in, practice *Japa*, repeat your *Mantra* with superhuman calm and determination!

Complete the 108 repetitions, close your mouth and let the *Japa* effortlessly progress into the background of your consciousness. Feel the protective shell made of tangible peace surrounding your person. I am not asking you to adopt a certain visualization but to try to be aware of the subtle and peaceful "substance" in which you are immersed. Sometimes this substance will be also felt by those who come in contact with you.

A useful tip is to practice *Japa* at least one hour before the *Kriya* session. Remember that after the practice of *Kriya Pranayama*, there is space for a long phase of internalization where the senses become dead to the external reality and are totally open to the internal reality.

If you decide to practice the *Higher Kriyas* (which involve physical movement) then start your routine with 24 *Kriya* breaths, at this point practice your *Higher Kriyas* and then resume the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* in order to recreate a state of stillness in your being. Then dedicate only to the practice of *mental Pranayama*.

Crossing the border of exhaustion

I tried to pass this experience on to other people. I remember a friend who practiced *Kriya* without getting any results. I told him about *Japa* but could not explain myself well. One day he showed me how he had interpreted my instruction and I witnessed a lifeless practice, a weary plea for mercy from God. I understood that for him *Japa* was only a brief emotional release. The *Mantra* he had chosen was nothing more than a sigh of self-pity. It was no wonder that, after a while, he gave up the practice.

Everything changed when he took part in a group pilgrimage. On that occasion someone began to recite the Catholic Rosary and all the pilgrims joined in this practice. Though tired and almost out of breath, my friend did not shy away from this act of devotion. Walking and whispering the *Prayer*, he began to enter a state of tranquility never known before. He looked at the spectacle of the landscapes that changed around him as he proceeded with different eyes and it seemed to him that he was living in a heavenly situation. He continued to repeat the *Prayer* non-stop along the

entire route (which exceeded 20 miles), completely forgetting that he was tired and sleepy. When the group stopped for a break he was lucky enough to be left alone, undisturbed. He entered an introspective state and was pervaded by something radiating from his heart that he identified with *Spiritual Reality*. The ecstatic state became solid as a rock, then it was almost unbearable, it overwhelmed him.

It is interesting to report how my friend summarized in a few words the correct way to practice *Japa*. In fact, he said that the secret consisted in reaching and overcoming the state of "exhaustion". After a few days he chose to repeat the same *Mantra* I had chosen and, thanks to it, he achieved the breathless state.

Well, perhaps it is not necessary to cross the border of exhaustion. Usually excellent effects are obtained by completing one *Mala* (a rosary of 108 beads) a day aloud and then letting the repetition of one's *Mantra* continue mentally and automatically. Nonetheless, the "law of exhaustion" is a precious resource for overcoming any possible internal resistance and thus experiencing, for the first time, the breathless state.

Consider *Lahiri Mahasaya's* motto "*Banat, Banat, ban jay!*" (doing, doing, one day done!) It gives you the idea of a person who, without ever getting discouraged, makes a great effort and then reaches the goal. The effort required of you is to remove the obstacles created by the mind. Practice *Japa* and the spiritual dimension will manifest without further effort on your part.

We look for God in books, but it is in Prayer that we find him. Prayer is the key that opens the door to God's heart for us. (*Padre Pio of Pietrelcina*)

A protest by some kriyabans

My enthusiasm for the practice of *Japa* was disturbed by an objection I received from some *kriyabans*. They told me that the *Kriya* techniques contain everything that is necessary for the spiritual path and that therefore we do not need other practices. They added, "Neither *Guruji* nor *Lahiri Mahasaya* taught *Japa* – *kriyabans* don't need it." They even seemed bothered by the thought that practicing *Japa* could pollute the purity of their spiritual path.

Now, I have good reason to believe that many of those who went to *Lahiri Mahasaya* not only already practiced *Japa*, but had taken the path of *Kriya Yoga* not to initiate something inherently different, but to deepen and intensify the practice of the *Continuous Prayer*, where they had already poured their soul. Probably for some, receiving *Thokar* initiation

represented the final crowning of their effort to attain the elevated state of the *Prayer of the heart*. There must be a reason why *Continuous Prayer* ("*Inner Prayer*", "*Prayer of the Heart*", "*Dhikr*") was and is the basic technique used by many mystics.

Perhaps the pride and arrogance of some have helped to spread the idea that *Japa* is an all too simple practice, suitable for simpletons – those who do not understand anything about *Prana* and *Chakra*.

It is a pity that *Kriya* schools do not officially give the teaching of *Devotional Prayer (Japa)*. The fact is that I saw the eyes filled with joy and sincere surrender to the Divine of those *kriyabans* who added – during the day, when they could be alone even for a few minutes – the practice of *Japa*.

Conclusion

Try to reflect for a moment: if all religions recommend *Prayer* as a fundamental act of their faith, will there be a valid reason? Or should we think that millions and millions of people are not very intelligent and it is we alone with our *Kriya* who know the right thing to do? I think we better humbly surrender to the evidence.

There are many reasons for practicing *Japa*. The project of giving up the pleasures of uncontrolled thinking during the day is a sacrifice that generates a new mind. Pursuing this goal, *Japa* transforms *Pranayama* from a simple exercise that aims to modify the state of some energetic currents in our body in cohabitation with a continuous state of bliss.

Indeed, you will never find such a precious practice as *Japa* to improve your *Kriya*. *Japa* works on the subconscious mind. One cannot practice *Kriya* with pure and simple willpower, it is necessary to obtain a state of deep relaxation.

So decide to "touch" this celestial dimension every day while remaining faithful to your practice of *Japa*. The magic of your bright, shimmering *Mantra* will spread to every aspect of your life.

Only in this dimension will you feel alive along the Spiritual Path. When you then have the experience of the breathless state, you will never be able to forget it and you will try to experience it every day of your life.

GOOD READINGS

The way of a Pilgrim

I recommend that you read the book "*The way of a pilgrim*." This is a novel written by an anonymous person in the mid-nineteenth century, translated into English in 1930, and it constitutes the best introduction to the spiritual current of *Hesychasm*.

As for the story contained in the book, no one knows for sure whether it is a true story about a particular pilgrim, or a spiritual novel created to spread the mystical dimension of the Christian Orthodox faith. Some, on the basis of certain testimonies, identify the author as the Russian Orthodox monk Archimandrite Mikhail Kozlov. Whatever the historical truth, such a pilgrim is the ideal representative of all those who spend their lives visiting sanctuaries, churches, monasteries, Mount Athos, the Holy Land, seeking God through *Continuous Prayer*.

The story is of a pilgrim who was returning from the Holy Sepulcher and who stopped at Mount Athos. One is struck by the opening words: "By the grace of God, I am a Christian, by my actions, a great sinner, and by calling, a homeless wanderer of the humblest birth roaming from place to place. My worldly goods are a knapsack with some dried bread in it, and in my breast pocket a Bible. And that is all". Below is a description of how the pilgrim was determined to travel the steppes to infinity in order to find a spiritual guide who would reveal the secret of the *Continuous Prayer*. The novel is therefore a story of his own research on how to be able to "pray continuously" – as St. Paul had recommended.

One day the pilgrim's ardor was rewarded when a spiritual master accepted him as a disciple and clarified every detail of the practice. The pilgrim was instructed to repeat the *Jesus Prayer* 3000 times a day, then 6000, then 12000. Following this advice, one day the pilgrim discovered that the *Prayer* had reached the secret and mysterious area of the heart. It happens spontaneously that the syllables of the *Prayer* were pronounced in synchrony with the beating of the heart. From then on, no matter what happened, the pilgrim would never be separated from God again.

The main reason for the attraction of the book *The Way of a Pilgrim* is the presentation of the life of a pilgrim as a model of life for those who wish to lead a spiritual life.

Of course, we *kriyabans* are "pilgrims", worn out and exasperated, moving from one pseudo guru to another – each frighteningly ignorant, faithful to one belief: that we Westerners are gullible who enjoy being deceived.

Thanks to the inspiration that comes from *The Way of a Pilgrim* we can decide to try the practice of *Japa*, or to whisper the *Prayer* we have chosen for a couple of hours a day. Instead of indulging in idleness, let's taste the divine honey of *Contemplative Prayer*. This leads us to a sincere act of opening our hearts to the Divine. We gradually discover that the goal that the Russian pilgrim has set for himself – reaching the state of *Continuous Prayer*, a real Heaven on earth, a state of unparalleled beauty – is not a myth, it can be achieved in our life.

Saint Teresa of Avila

Very much inspiring is the reading of the works of Teresa of Avila who emphasizes the importance of the "Interior Prayer". Let us treasure her teachings.²

To those who have not yet approached interior prayer, she begs them not to deprive themselves of such a good. She teaches that expecting to enter the spirit world without first entering ourselves is madness. Interior prayer is the means given by the Divine to acquire perfection. Each person has been given the opportunity to reach the true purpose of their existence: each is required to grasp their life with resolve and undertake a path of movement towards the center of their being. On this journey "souls without interior prayer are like a crippled and paralyzed body that has hands and feet, but cannot move them."

She explains that the practice of interior prayer begins with the voice, that is, using a certain formula without reciting it quickly and without attention. You choose a single formula, not several formulas.

A memorized prayer is often used. It must be simple but it must involve the soul and the body. Fidelity to it is important. It is clear that this internal prayer must not be reduced to a monotonous and distracted recitation of words, without thinking about what is being said and without participating with the heart.

If involuntary distractions occur there is no need to worry, it is worth the attention with which we began to pray, which in a certain sense continues to act, orienting us towards the Divine, unless we voluntarily withdraw the desire to enter communion with the Divine. It is useless to pray if it does not lead us to get in touch with the Divine, and this happens when one enters into confidence and surrender. We must bring our whole life and our own pains and limitations into prayer with the trust of those who believe in the healing power of the love of the Divine.

Having clarified how to begin, it is interesting to see how according to Teresa of Avila we get to the heart of the practice. The core of the internal prayer is constituted by the overwhelming experience of loving the Divine to which one is addressed. Prayer is no longer a repeated, mechanical, mnemonic verbal recitation, but the intimate expression to the Divine of

² Saint Teresa of Ávila (March 28, 1515 – October 4, 1582) was a Carmelite nun. Her teaching flows from her own experience and not from books. She saw that with a simple *Prayer*, to be repeated without cease, a soul can cross all the different levels of the spiritual path up to the union with God.

our personal feeling of love! Prayer becomes an intimate relationship of friendship, a frequent entertainment alone with the One by whom we know we are loved. It becomes the realization of being in company with the one we know we are loved by! Teresa of Avila repeats this concept in her writings: "Prayer does not consist in thinking a lot, but in loving a lot". This sincere transport towards the Divine is an attitude that must last a lifetime. Prayer should not be done sometimes and then postponed to who knows when, waiting for it to give then who knows what fruit! It is a good thing during the day to recall the resolution we formulated during prayer, to continue the day in His presence.

God can lead souls to Himself through many paths, but prayer is the "sure way". Leaving it means getting lost.

She thinks that if we pass a period without prayer, the Divine welcomes us as before. The word of God is immutable: God does not change, it is we who change. God is not afraid if we have forgotten about Him. He's afraid we won't look for Him! He fears that we will lose our confidence in Him. Sometimes He gives us greater graces after we have abandoned Him for a while!

As for the Divine, no one has ever taken Him in vain as a friend. Let us remember that it is He who pushes us to pray! And it is He who listens and responds. No one doubts that the best friend does not listen to him when he speaks to him or confides in him. Sometimes we don't hear His answers because we talk, we talk. Let's try to be silent. Sooner or later we will listen to that "voice" without sound yet so talkative!

She explained that with the Prayer:

... the body becomes insensitive and the will is totally captivated by irresistible devotion. The other faculties, such as memory, reason, and imagination, are progressively captivated and occupied with God. Both intellect and will are absorbed in God. Distractions are not possible and the external bodily senses are made prisoners.

Sometimes her words may seem obscure to people – however with the practice of *Kriya* they become clear. Let's consider this example:

The soul is wounded with love for the Divine. Body and Spirit are in the throes of a sweet, happy pain, alternating between a fearful fiery glow, a complete impotence, unconsciousness, and a feeling of *suffocation*, sometimes intermixed with such an ecstatic flight that the body is literally lifted into space. There are moments in which you feel like an arrow has deeply penetrated your heart. One laments with such a vivid and intense pain, but at the same time the experience is so delicious you never want it to end.

She is explaining what happens when spiritual energy enters the heart. This description is true, profoundly true. When you experience that such a force arises, no other reaction can occur, other than a gigantic wave of love towards the Divine, the force of which intensifies in the heart center, as if a powerful hand were gripping it. When you return to the normal state of consciousness, you cannot stop the tears of devotion.

Let nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you, all things are passing, God is unchanging. Patience gains all; nothing is lacking to those who have God: God alone is sufficient.

In conclusion, according to Teresa, Prayer is EVERYTHING in the mystical path. She firmly believed that the soul that does not create the habit of *Prayer* will not reach the mystical goal. There is no other exercise on which she insist so much in all her writings and which she attach so much importance to.

You can do nothing without *Prayer* and you can do miracles with it.

Let us stop at this point and reflect: " The soul that does not create the habit of *Prayer* will not reach the mystical goal! " This statement is like an arrow that comes from the Divine itself. It gives me chills.

I wonder what a person who has only the "scientific method of *Kriya*" in hand can do when he does not also have *Prayer*. Teresa says that that soul will not reach the mystical goal. I think we can now understand the reason for the failure of so many people.

A note on Tibetan Buddhism

I must admit that Tibetan Buddhism insists so much on the value of the *Mantra* that I could not fail to mention this source of inspiration.

Their teaching is to repeat: "*Om Mani Padme Hum*" (I greet the jewel in the lotus) over and over again until the chaos of thoughts subsides. We rarely encounter technical observations, practical teachings, but you can find them if you keep looking.

Amid an enormous amount of tedious rhetoric, I found a beautiful lesson. I try to summarize it: by repeating a *Mantra*, the pulse of the heart becomes clearly perceptible and the attention turns to the simple movement of the breath through the nostrils in and out ... in and out. You are no longer lost in thoughts. You are no longer upset. You are in the state of meditation. The layers that cover your true being reveal your true nature which is love and compassion.

If Tibetan Buddhism stopped there, everything would be perfect. Unfortunately some devotees attempt a childish demonstration of how all the Buddha's teachings are contained in the *Mantra*: "*Om Mani Padme Hum*." You also find blatant exaggerations such as the fact that if any animal or insect should hear this *Mantra* before dying, it would be reborn in the pure land of *Amitabha* Another story is that by reciting the *Mantra* with participation and correct understanding, all suffering will dissolve and up to seven generations of that person's descendants will not be reborn in the lower realms. ..

A little annoyed we read that seeing the written form of the *Mantra* has the same effect as reciting it ... or that the fact of rotating the written form of the *Mantra* around a wheel gives the same benefit as saying the *Mantra* ... We are used to such nonsense and we know for sure that the beauty, purity and value of the practice of the *Mantra* said with our voice and heart has no substitutes.

THE PRAYER OF THE HEART

In the book "*The way of a pilgrim*" there is the description of how the pilgrim, following the instructions of his Master, discovers one day that the *Prayer* is on his lips and in his mind every moment he is awake – as spontaneously and effortlessly as the breath itself. In this wonderful condition he is able to experience the effulgence of divine light, the intimate "secret of the heart".

"Like a person enjoying the beauty of a chilly winter near the fireside, one who practices continuous prayer contemplates either the sad or the joyous spectacle of life having found the infinity of the skies residing in their heart! Prayer is a marvelous gem whose glitter warms up life. Its magic spreads into each facet of life, like walking out of a dark room into fresh air and sunlight.

We now want to talk about this interior "secret of the heart". Many think that the *Prayer of the heart* is a *Prayer* pronounced with sincere devotion, reflecting on the meaning of the words of which it is composed ... In reality it is much more! It is the *Prayer* chanted in sync with the beats of the heart. Each beat coincides with a syllable of the *Prayer*. To explain how to do this, I will describe two preliminary steps.

[First preliminary step] *Merging the Prayer with the breath*

Sit comfortably with your spine as straight as possible and try to lengthen the rhythm of your breathing. Breathe in and out through the nostrils so that the breath makes a slight noise in the throat. As soon as the breath

reaches a steady and regular rhythm, combine the *Prayer* with the movement of the breath. If the *Prayer* is short, repeat it mentally as you inhale and again as you exhale. If the *Prayer* is long, mentally repeat half as you inhale and half as you exhale. If you are unable to complete the *Prayer* during a full breath, this means that the *Prayer* you have chosen is too long.

After a few breaths combined with the *Prayer*, proceed as follows. Breathe in. As you exhale, let your chin touch your chest and feel the *Prayer* reach the heart *Chakra*. Remain motionless in this position with your eyes closed for a few moments perceiving a radiance. Repeat and repeat. By this practice you are emptying the contents of your mind. It is difficult to think of a single thought: the state of *Mental Silence* appears very strong. Subtle happiness pervades your soul. Stay in this dimension as long as possible.

[Second preliminary step] *Prayer in the form of a cross*

Practice a few breaths as follows. As you inhale, you feel a movement of energy going from the left side of the body to the right side. As you exhale, feel a movement of energy from the right side of the body to the left. With this breath, another breath follows creating a cross. The energy, perceived in the abdominal region, moves upward through the dorsal region during inhalation and returns downward during exhalation. As in the previous practice, combine the *Prayer* with the movements of the breath.

Continue alternating between the two ways of breathing. Feel how concentration on the heart *Chakra* naturally intensifies. It only takes 6 pairs of breaths to make this breathing automatic and effortless.

Drawing this "cross" using two full breaths constitutes a cycle. The breathing is very calm. Inhalation and exhalation last approximately 3 seconds each. Do this for at least 10 minutes.

By repeating this practice in the following days you will notice how the procedure is internalized. In other words, you will begin to feel the energetic movement as the breath becomes shorter and shorter, almost non-existent. You will be impressed with the effectiveness of this procedure. 108 unhurried cycles take no more than 30 minutes.

This way of praying can be a decisive, providential help for a person who experiences a rift between the sphere of the mind and that of the heart. I can assure you that the deepest and most lasting results will not only be perceived by you but those who have known you for some time will see them. They will notice (with sincere amazement) your transformation.

Prayer of the heart

After many days of practicing the "*Prayer in the form of a cross*" you are ready to practice the actual *Prayer of the heart*. You will need to have at

least 20 minutes of free time.

Feel the "*place of the heart*", turn all your attention to it, forget the breath. Try to feel the heartbeat. The perception need not be very clear. Just a little. If you persist, the perception will become clearer and clearer by the day.

In the meditation position, with the chin slightly lowered, make each beat coincide with a syllable of the *Prayer*. This is also difficult, but don't give up. With this new criterion, applied constantly, you will reach the stage where the breath first and the heartbeat then tend to slow down. Finally you will understand what it means to pray no longer with "*the mind in the head*", but with "*the mind in the heart*."

Transformation happening in your life

The *devotional Prayer* which becomes a daily habit and is deepened in the *Prayer of the heart* represents the most direct way of "straightening" one's spiritual path. It has the power to make every effort made in the past in the spiritual field converge in the right direction. Your mind will always remain the same but you will have the impression of having access to a completely new perception of reality. This is because the heart plays a decisive role.

The study of the literature on the concept that the heart mysteriously functions as a brain in its own right is very inspiring.

We stay away from controversy: we have no scientific proof that the heart has its own "brain." Nevertheless a serious and sensitive person will have evidence that this "brain of the heart" affects our consciousness. It is clear that creating a relationship of harmony with it is a very important step for what concerns our evolution.

It is like following an "internal teacher" whose suggestions guide you to manifest a more subtle and creative intelligence. A great revolution happens in your life. You will be aware of the filter, built by the conditioning, that has distorted your perception of reality. You will see the flowering of the best qualities in your personality (deep gratification, feelings of gratitude towards every little beautiful thing that happens in our life, unconditional love towards the Divine.)

When the *Prayer of the heart* is practiced seriously, the *Prayer* becomes continuous. In every possible moment of silence you will be aware of the *Prayer* which gently and comfortably continues to repeat itself, like music in the background of your consciousness. When silence is not possible you will keep silence in your heart. You will feel like a burning brazier located in the chest region. This first mild sensation can turn into a feeling of

solidification of the heart that feels like a point surrounded by infinite pressure.³ In this way you live, always remembering God. This harmony is not lost during sleep.

I sleep, but my heart waketh
(*Song of Solomon 5:2*)

The soul is aware of a deep satisfaction. Something that tastes like eternal life invades your being. The soul feels that it is in contact with an *Infinite Goodness*. The intensity of this state grows and grows. You realize that you are not in a position to resist this all-consuming emotion: you realize that behind it is the Divine.

Unheard of Light is born from this ineffably,
And thence, beyond all telling, the heart's illumination.
Last comes – a step that has no limit
Though compassed in a single line –
Perfection that is endless.
(*Monk Theophanis, the Hesychast ascetic of the 8th century*)

SOME PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH JAPA

Japa on a pilgrimage

After many years of my first experiences with *Japa*, I decided to have a more intense experience with it. Beginning with Monday, I decided to only practice *Japa* in my routine until Saturday when I would take part in a pilgrimage, praying "incessantly."

During the days of preparation I went to the countryside not to practice my *Kriya* routine but only to practice *Japa*. It was a clear day and looking up at the blue sky I could contemplate a couple of clouds floating in the golden light. I sat down and began to repeat the *Prayer*. The session lasted longer than I had anticipated. I felt supported by a calm euphoria.

After ten minutes I began to chant the *Prayer* mentally. I observed that the *Prayer* was repeated in the spine in sync with the breath. This was irresistible, it was impossible for me to act differently. I mentally sang half of the *Prayer* during the inhalation and half during the exhalation.

It came spontaneously to me to move my chin up and down following the movement of the *Prayer* in the spine. The passion that warmed my heart intensified when, descending with the *Prayer*, I reached

³ St Theresa also explains the same concept: "From this pressure comes a strange experience of pain. We perceive the Divine, the endless Light and we burn of love. We realize the moment has not yet come to become one with that endless Light and Bliss: hence tears of intense longing."

the heart *Chakra*. There was a tendency to prolong the exhalation. At the end of the exhalation I remained with my chin down and with my eyes closed for a few moments, perceiving the annihilation of my mind.

As I wrote, Saturday was the day of the pilgrimage. The plan was to walk all night to be able to reach a beautiful shrine the following morning. As I walked mentally repeating my *Mantra*, I had the sweet intuition that my friends' lives were enveloped in love. I moved around as if my heart contained a brazier. The center of what I call "myself" was not in the brain but in my heart. And in my heart I felt like a tension of tenderness. The vision increased in power. I was pervaded by the perception that my peers could not instinctively avoid loving or taking care of someone – their children for example. Each had the power to perform great and incredible deeds. As a result, no one was sure that he was protected from painful experiences. Their life, being immersed in love was also immersed in pain and tragedy. Duality is implicit in earthly existence, intertwined with our being. The sense of this reality that no one can escape was experienced as a painful squeeze that broke my chest.

While I was immersed in these thoughts, the sun rose on our path and the sanctuary appeared on a hill, something melted in my depths and an intensity of love was born that the same experience turned into a pain filled with bliss.

I went back to the countryside many times to focus on plain *Japa*. I increased the length of my practice. Summer came with long sunsets and evenings that seemed to have no end. Living those long sessions in the countryside, in total freedom and in a state of mystical "intoxication" was an unforgettable event. I am so nostalgic for that period. The devotion I felt then was not the classic feeling that we call *Bhakti*. It was the sense of being shattered, annihilated by something that in my journals I call "Unbearable Beauty." Then, lost in my innocent exaltation, I compared this state with the meditative experience that St. Teresa of Avila called "Infused Recollection. "

A glorious delirium, a celestial folly, a state of unspeakable delights. It is an inebriation of love in which the soul doesn't know what to do, whether to speak or to keep silent, whether to cry or to laugh. The soul is conscious of a deep satisfaction. The soul feels invaded by something that has the taste of eternal life and feels as if coming into contact with an *Endless Goodness*. Hence comes the feeling that there is nothing on the earth worthy of your desire or attention. (*S. Therese*)

Experience with Micro Tribhangamurari

At some point in my life the time came when I decided to complete the incremental routine of the *Tribhangamurari Micro movement* using the *Prayer* given by Lahiri Mahasaya: *Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya* [see chapter 9].

As I explained then I had discovered how useful it was not to proceed by chanting the syllables only mentally, but by whispering them softly and this I did on such occasions.

Often an invincible drowsiness won over my every effort. On the inner screen of awareness many images appeared as daydreams. Changing the position of the legs, practicing *Maha Mudra* frequently, or interrupting for a short break didn't help. After some rest, my problem was not solved – the sleepiness reappeared immediately as soon as I resumed the practice. There was no way (coffee, a lot of sleep ...) to guard against sleepiness; there was nothing to do but accept the situation and get used to practicing while constantly feeling half sleepy.

One day I practiced on the beach, among the people who did not bother me but whom I could hear walking nearby. If I sensed that they were looking at me, I pretended to read a little book that I always kept open on my lap. The bliss was enormous.

At sunset I leaned my back against a rock and practiced with my eyes open. The sky was an indestructible crystal of infinite transparency and the waves constantly changed their color. Behind the dark lenses of my sunglasses my eyes were filled with tears. I cannot describe what I perceived except in poetic form.

There is an Indian chant (in the final part of the film *Mahabharata*) whose words are taken from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*: "I know this Great Spirit, radiant like the sun, transcending any material conception of darkness. Only those who know Him can transcend the limits of birth and death. There is no other way to achieve liberation than to know this Great Spirit. " When I listen to the beautiful voice of the Indian singer repeating "There is no other way", my heart knows that nothing will have the power to keep me away from this state and from this fantastically beautiful practice that will accompany me until the end of my days.

CHAPTER 12

HOW KRIYA YOGA WAS BORN

I found it very inspiring and useful to research the origins of *Kriya* in some mystical traditions. In chapter 5 I hinted at the hypothesis that *Lahiri Mahasaya's* work was to achieve a synthesis of methods used centuries earlier by various mystics. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the basis for validating this hypothesis and to see clearly how *Kriya Yoga* constitutes a collection of tools similar to those used by the mystics of the greatest spiritual traditions. I will try to provide some material to better understand this concept.

When we begin the *Kriya* path, we are almost always naïve. We would like to find a book that explains the *Kriya* techniques in detail, that has beautiful pictures, understandable diagrams, that constitutes a concrete help to our efforts. We buy what we find on the market. Almost always, leafing through such books, we are disappointed. We do not find what we were looking for: there is no practical information. The first reaction is to throw the book in the waste bin. Many people, myself, have done this.

Unfortunately many books on *Kriya* contain a tedious rhetoric, endless repetitions, all immersed in useless references to abstruse philosophical theories so much that with the exception of one or two interesting lines, all the rest is to be thrown away.

We do not know what *Lahiri Mahasaya* personally taught his disciples, what advice he gave to each of them. It is unrealistic to live in the hope that someone can rebuild that world for us. Let us instead be inspired by what can be found in the core of great mystical paths.

In this chapter I will bring four precise examples of mystical paths where clear traces of *Kriya Yoga* are found. I will give a simple introduction to the following mystical paths: *Inner Alchemy (Nei Dan)*, *Hesychasm*, *Sufi* and *Radhasoami*.

Put in this order, these spiritual traditions symbolize the discoveries that one who seriously practices *Kriya Yoga* normally makes. He begins by going up and down the spine until he collects the energy in the navel region and this is the starting point of the *Inner Alchemy*. The meaning of this gathering with such insistence in this region is explained to us by *Hesychasm* which presents it as the secret way to reach the center of the heart. The strong action we are taught in *Kriya* to open the door to the *Sushumna* we call *Thokar* is the central method of the *Sufi* discipline: their

Dhikr or *Zikr*. All the wonder, the fascination, the mystery that we will find there, namely the *Omkar* dimension, is with boundless insistence pursued in the teaching of the *Radhasoami* movement.

I invite the reader to study and deepen these paths. I am sure that such studies can inspire us, intuitively guiding us to deepen the *Kriya* discipline.

Instead, I will not write anything about the classical tradition of *Yoga* as I believe it is well known to the reader. I remember that it is found in *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* and in the three classics: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita* and *Shiva Samhita*.

[I] INNER ALCHEMY (NEI DAN)

Taoist Internal Alchemy is a spiritual discipline, the esoteric core of Taoism, the mystical tradition of ancient China. My first reference book was *Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality* by Charles Luk & Lu Kuan. Reading involved me totally with great force; I photocopied many pages, cut out the most important pieces, put them in order according to an ideal logical sequence of exposure and glued them on four sheets of paper that summarized respectively the four phases of the *Inner Alchemy*. I am sure that the study of *Inner Alchemy* is absolutely profitable for a *kriyaban*.

When I read the description of the basic procedure (*Microcosmic Orbit*) of this ancient discipline, I saw that it was very similar to *Kriya Pranayama* – but not exactly the same! However, the various metaphors used to explain the mechanism of the *Microcosmic Orbit* (the inverted bagpipe, the flute without holes ...) brought to mind with surprising analogy some explanations relating to *Kriya Pranayama*, difficult to understand, which I had received many years earlier from an illustrious source.

The difference between the *Microcosmic Orbit* and *Kriya Pranayama* is that in the first the energy descends down into the body touching not the *Chakras* but the points on the surface of the body that are connected with the *Chakras*: Adam's apple, the central region of the sternum, the navel, the pubic region and the *Perineum*. Proceeding with the practice, the difference between the two procedures fades, as the result produced on the energy of the body is the same.

I was surprised: perhaps *Kriya Yoga* was *Taoist Internal Alchemy* taught within an Indian context, with blatant use of both purely Indian techniques and procedures (such as *Navi Kriya*) that were Indian only in appearance? Indeed, *Kriya Yoga* turned out to be a discipline that could be described through the symbols of two different cultures. Perhaps due to this relationship with the *Internal Alchemy*, *Kriya Yoga* is decidedly deeper and richer than *Tantric Kundalini Yoga*.

I thought it was not a bizarre idea that the mythical *Babaji* is one of the "immortals" of the *Taoist* tradition.

[I] Microcosmic Orbit

The first stage is the basis of the whole internal alchemical process: it is about activating the *Microcosmic Orbit*.

Let your breath free. With eyebrows raised, become sensitive to the inner light. Try now to intuitively perceive this light in the "front" part of each *Chakra*. "Frontal" means that it is located on the front of the body. Coming down from *Kutastha*, awareness descends through the tongue into the laryngeal prominence (here is the frontal component of the fifth *Chakra*.) The perception of the internal light at that point occurs for a few seconds. Then the awareness descends in the central region of the sternum ... also here the perception of the inner light occurs for the same time ... then in the navel ... then in the pubic region and finally in the perineum. Then the concentration moves up, behind the spine. The perception of the inner light takes place in the second *Chakra*; then in the third ... and so on up to *Medulla*, the occipital region, the *fontanel*, ending again in *Kutastha* where the attention stops for a longer time. Do this only mentally for weeks, then use a deep breath.

As you inhale, awareness and energy (Qi) are lifted along the *Control* channel (behind the spine) and let flow downwards as you exhale along the *Function* channel (in the front of the body). The purpose of this action is "Bring Three to Two, Two to One". What does this enigmatic phrase mean?

"Three" is a reference to the three energies: **Jing** = Sexual Energy, **Qi** = Love Energy and **Shen** = Spiritual Energy.

Sexual energy is not only what the name implies but it is the agent that makes us enjoy sensory perceptions and gives us the strength, the determination to fight the battle of life and get all the things necessary for it (unfortunately we struggle also to obtain things that are superfluous to our life, but this is another problem ...).

The energy of love is a deep feeling towards another person, towards living creatures, towards life in general and it is also the joy that we feel in front of an artistic expression. It is the fuel of just and impartial actions originating from noble instincts and ethical laws.

The spiritual energy vibrates during the highest moments of aesthetic contemplation, where vast prophetic visions can manifest.

It has been explained that these three energies derive from a single reality, being their division originated at the moment of our birth and

strengthened by the education received and social life. Well, the *Microcosmic Orbit* recreates the very original harmony. Breath by breath, sexual thoughts (which seem to have strengthened) turn into thoughts of love. The energy of love acquires strength, determination not to succumb to any obstacle; it is then raised into the head where it mixes with the energy of the Spirit. It is only in this way that any fracture in our personality disappears: our life full of contradictions begins to flow naturally, unhindered towards the Spirit. We understand that the *Microcosmic Orbit* involves a "permanent healing action on the whole personality."

While through *Kundalini Yoga* one is simply trying to rise to the crown of the head to experience divine ecstasy, in *Taoist Internal Alchemy* one uses that state to reach the body, nourish it and transform it.

Well, *Kriya Pranayama* should work exactly like the *Microcosmic Orbit* by recreating the original harmony, thus healing us from the fractures that exist in our personality. We can practice *Kriya Pranayama* more consciously and deeply!

If we conceive of *Kriya Yoga* only as a path of "ascent", this means that it is incomplete and must be balanced by a descending movement.

This fact should continue steadily until one settles into a calm point of balance and harmony.

Many religious paths teach to maintain, indeed to cultivate as a virtue, the division between matter and spirit, and sexuality is repressed as impure. We know that this is the main cause of exhausting conflicts in people who tend to be spiritual. ⁴

No tradition respects the whole mystery of human nature like the *Taoist Internal Alchemy*. One who wants to follow the spiritual path should listen to the practical wisdom that this path embodies. Doing so could avoid a wide range of problems. Only common sense, love for natural laws and the intuition that comes from meditation promotes the true inner search that leads to Self Realization. One should consider the teachings received from tradition, feel any heavy conditioning, see all potential limitations and

⁴ Some *kriyabans* develop sexual thoughts and become sexually aroused during the initial deep breaths of their *Kriya Pranayama*. We will never get tired of repeating: this is perfectly normal! Those who assume *Kechari Mudra*, either proper or a simplified form of it, and concentrate, during exhalation, on the flow of *Prana* in the body (it is very beneficial to visualize it passing through the tip of the tongue into the throat and into the body, each part of the body, as a beatific, healing rain restoring life in each cell) will immediately experience how sexual thoughts disappear and become pure love. This great energy of love will gradually turn into pure aspiration for the spiritual goal.

dangers, and take the courageous responsibility of correcting them.

[II] Guiding the energy in the lower Dantian

Spiritual energy stored in the head as a result of the *Microcosmic Orbit* is carried into the *Dantian*. We know that *Dantian* (referred to here as "*Lower Dantian*") is the size of a ball whose diameter is approximately two-and-a-half inches long. To locate its position one must concentrate on the navel, coming approximately one and a half inches back and below for the same extent.

A deep inhalation guides the energy into the *Dantian*. The breath is held here with *Jalandhara Bandha* and *Mula Bandha*. After this action, a quiet exhalation follows. This action is repeated many, many times – visualization helps compress the energy in the *Dantian* to the size of a pearl. Inner heat increases.

We *kriyabans* say that after mixing *Prana* and *Apana* by means of *Kriya Pranayama*, the *Samana* current comes into play. *Internal Alchemy* has expressions that inspire us much more, for example: "Return to the center"; "The union of heaven and earth"; "The birth of the golden flower"; "The Creation of the Resplendent Gem"; "The creation of the elixir of immortality. "

What we need to understand is that finding stability in this unfathomably deep *Dantian* region means being born into the spiritual life.

[III] Push the energy towards the Middle Dantian and the Upper Dantian

It is difficult to understand which procedures are prescribed at this stage because in the related literature, some suggestions on this subject are embellished in an abnormal way by means of many evocative terms, metaphors that make it almost impossible to have a clear practical understanding.

What is reasonable to think is that it is enough to concentrate on the vibration created in the *lower Dantian*, while the breath becomes more and more subtle, to make the energy found in the abdomen rise spontaneously in the region of the heart and illuminate the "*space of the heart*" (the *Middle Dantian*.) The contemplation of the Light that shines in this region presides over the manifestation of "*true serenity*". This reveals the *fundamental nature* of the practitioner.

Continuing to contemplate this light, the energy rises along the central axis of the body in front of the spine (*Thrusting Channel*) up to the center between the eyebrows (*Upper Dantian*) from where the *Macrocosmic Orbit* will then be set in motion.

[IV] Macrocosmic Orbit

The *Fourth Stage* is a great event that occurs after having achieved complete mastery of the *Third Stage*.

When the energy is increased in the *Thrusting Channel* and reaches the *Upper Dantian (Kutastha)* a spontaneous phenomenon of circulation of energy in the body (*Macrocosmic Orbit*) which has enormous implications is set in motion.

The three energies (sexual, love and spirit) are harmoniously mixed, they have created the *elixir of immortality*. It trickles down into the body and nourishes each cell. This occurs in a state called "*prenatal breathing*" which is a movement of internal energy that gives perceptions similar to those obtained with the *Microcosmic Orbit* but is now experienced in the breathless state (*Kevala Kumbhaka*). This subtle experience makes the spiritual path complete: The Divine is infused into our body. The spiritual path does not end with an out-of-body flight into the rarefied dimensions of Spirit. The *Macrocosmic Orbit* reveals scenarios of perfect Beauty that one did not even dare to dream of.

From a certain moment on, the downward movement turns into an indefinite pressure on all the cells of the body. This event expands – unexpectedly – the boundaries of awareness. Experiencing this means having fully reached the last part of the spiritual path.

We have every reason to believe that this is the same experience that we call in *Kriya Yoga: Pranayama with internal breathing*. This is a very peculiar phenomenon of energy circulation in the body. The breath is absent, the body is charged with *static Prana*. The obstruction at the base of the spine is perfectly removed. The circulation of energy is perceived as an "internal breath." A person spontaneously enters a state of perfect peace and well-being and perceives a great infusion of energy that descends like a golden liquid in the body, in all its cells. Let's say then that the breath is completely oriented inwards.

[III] HESICASM

An easy way to approach the teachings of *Hesychasm* is to read *The way of the Pilgrim*.

The term *Hesychasm* comes from the Greek word "*hesychia*" which means internal stillness, tranquility and calm: without this condition, meditation is not possible. The discipline that underlies this mystical path is the continual repetition of the *Jesus Prayer* ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of

God, have mercy on me".) This spiritual practice begins by whispering the *Prayer* and then moving on to mental repetition. It was already used by the early Church Fathers in the fourth and fifth centuries.

There were hermits who dwelt in the desert, seeking inner peace and spiritual introspection by practicing contemplation and self-discipline: they had no doubts that knowledge of God could only be obtained through purity of soul and *Prayer*, not by mere study or pure mental pleasures in the field of philosophy. Later, their ascetic method began to reveal itself as a concrete set of psycho physical techniques: this is, effectively, the core of *Hesychasm*. It was Simeon, "the new theologian" (1025-1092), who developed the quietist theory with such precision that he could be considered the father of this movement. The practice, which involved specific body positions and precise breathing patterns, was intended to perceive the *Uncreated Light of God*.

Practical teachings

"Glorify God in your body," said St. Paul (1 Cor. 6:19). But how does this happen in practice? How can we make our body an active participant in the work of *Prayer*? Here we can face one of the most fascinating attempts in the history of Christian spirituality: that of giving the body an effective role during *Prayer*. So let's try to understand how the *Hesychast* tradition teaches to achieve this.

First part: breath control and repetition of the Prayer

To begin with, it is recommended to do several forward prostrations (bowing from the waist area.) Twelve prostrations suffice. It is explained that such prostrations warm the body and strengthen the fervor of the *Prayer*.

Then a particular body position is adopted. "Sit in a quiet cell, remaining alone in a corner", says Pseudo-Simeon. Gregorio of Sinai is more precise: "Sit on a seat a span high", that is, about nine inches. Evidently he was not thinking of a normal chair but of a low, backless banquet. This in itself is an innovation. Such advice would have seemed far more unusual to a thirteenth or fourteenth century reader than it appears to us. In ancient times the normal position for *Christian Prayer* was surely standing.

In this position one begins to control the breath. Pseudo-Simeon explains that the rhythm of the breath must be deliberately slowed down: "Restrict the entry of the breath through your nostrils, so as not to breathe easily." This means that one breathes through the nostrils so that the breath produces a noise in the throat. [We recognize in this detail the starting point of *Kriya Pranayama*.] This breath control is a preliminary exercise which precedes the repetition of the *Jesus Prayer* or which accompanies it.

As soon as the breath reaches a steady and regular rhythm, *Prayer* is associated with the breath. In ancient times we do not find an indication as to exactly how the rhythm of the breathing and the words of the *Prayer* are to be coordinated. Such teachings remained vague – perhaps intentionally. In modern practice it is common to mentally say the first half of the *Prayer*, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God", as you breathe in, and the second half, "have mercy on me", as you breathe out. This is the procedure that is recommended in the book *The Way of a Pilgrim*. There is no difficulty, even without expert guidance, in using this simple breathing technique.

Proceed for a minimum of 15 minutes; after a couple of weeks it goes to 30 minutes. It is very useful to count the number of repetitions on the beads of a rosary.

Finally pass to a purely mental repetition, leaving the breath free to flow spontaneously. It is important to note that true discipline must be internal, not external; a physical technique can aid in concentration, but it can never be a substitute for the inner alertness of the intellect.

This *Prayer* is a *Prayer* like all the others. There is nothing special about itself, but it receives all its power from the state of mind in which it is made. There is only one recommendation that every *Hesychast* must apply: keep attention in the heart. Every effort one makes in *Prayer* must be directed towards this result. This eliminates distractions, clears the mind of images, and thus helps to achieve inner calm. It is recommended to turn to the Lord so that he can give His blessing: this is the hidden treasure in the field, the pearl that is priceless.

Second part: discover the place of the heart

As you sit comfortably with your head bowed forward and your eyes directed towards the abdomen, focus your physical gaze, along with the fullness of your intellect, on the center of your belly or *navel*. In this way, do not look to either side, but fix the gaze on the navel as a point of support. [This is what happens in *Navi Kriya*.]

With the concentration on the *navel*, try to enter it, as if the navel were a "door." Search within yourself with your intellect as to find the place in the heart, where all the powers of the soul reside. It is stated that what you will find there may seem at first a kind of joyless darkness but if you, undeterred, continue with this practice, you will achieve limitless happiness. You will see the open space within the heart and contemplate the "*Uncreated Light*." Your heart will be filled with love-filled bliss! Such an extraordinary experience will make you realize that "what you experienced before that experience was nothing!"

When the *Hesychast* texts speak of "finding the place of the heart", they mean that at first our attention is on the region of the physical heart. But, since the heart is at the same time the spiritual center of the totality of the human being, through this concentration on the physical heart we become able to enter the relationship with our deep self and thus we discover the true dimension of our personality in the Divine. Making the intellect "descend from the head to the heart" thus means reaching an integration, realizing oneself as a unified whole formed in the divine image.

The *Hesychasts* explain that the center between the eyebrows is not suitable for all phases of meditation. If the energy of thoughts descends to the level of the throat – as it normally happens when reciting the *Prayer* – it acquires an evocative power recharged with emotional values. As a consequence, there is a tendency to get lost in mental associations. But if we bring the center of awareness into the heart, then the attention reaches a complete cohesion. It is sustained by a higher intensity and nothing extraneous can disturb it.

Lahiri Mahasaya's teachings lead, through the practice of *Thokar*, in the same direction. Hesychasm teaches to enter the space of the heart starting from the navel region by means of a long, persistent effort, trying to open the door of the inner temple. In both paths the door finally opens and one rejoices in the fruit of his efforts.

Historical note

The monks of Athos could have quietly continued to contemplate this *Uncreated Light* (which they considered to be the highest goal in life) had their methods not been denounced as superstitious and absurd. The objection was mainly based on an energetic rejection of the possibility that their *Uncreated Light* constituted the Divine essence. Around the year 1337, *Hesychasm* attracted the attention of a learned member of the Orthodox Church, Barlaam of Seminara, a Calabrian monk (later became Petrarch's Greek teacher) who was abbot in a monastery in Constantinople and who visited Mount Athos. There he met the *Hesychasts* and heard descriptions of their practices. Barlaam, trained in Western Scholastic theology, was scandalized and began to fight him both verbally and in his writings. The associated practice of *Hesychasm* was characterized as "magic". He called the *Hesychasts* "omphalopsychoi" – people who have their souls in their navels (due to the long time they spent focusing their concentration on the umbilical region). Barlaam proposed a more intellectual approach to knowledge of God than what the *Hesychasts* taught: he asserted that this knowledge could only be obtained through investigative work carried out by the mind and translated into

discrimination between true and false. He argued that no part of God could ever be seen by humans.

The practice of the *Hesychasts* was defended by San Gregorio Palamas. He was well educated in Greek philosophy and defended *Hesychasm* in 1340, in three different synods in Constantinople, and also wrote a number of works in its defense.

Palamas rejected the Barlaam controversy. His main concern was not with physical technique as such but with the more fundamental doctrinal issues concerning the controversy: the character of the *Divine Light* which according to him was *Uncreated* (in other words it had not appeared with the creation of the Universe but existed before) and which was knowable to man.

He used a distinction, already formulated in the fourth century in the works of the Cappadocian Fathers, between God's inaccessible essence and the energies or works of God through which the devotee can share divine life. In short, the essence of God is unknowable while His energies can be known both in this and the next life; they illuminate the *Hesychast* who has been granted the experience of the *Uncreated Light* through which he receives the true spiritual knowledge of God.

But, while he did not give a central meaning to the method concerning physical practice, Palamas nevertheless believed that it could be defended from the theological point of view. It was based, and he was convinced of it, on a solid biblical theology concerning the human person. He considered this method, when used prudently and wisely, to be a practical aid.

In 1341 the dispute was settled: Barlaam was condemned and returned to Calabria, later became bishop in the Roman Catholic Church. At last, the *Hesychast* doctrine was established as the doctrine of the Orthodox Church. Until now, the Roman Catholic Church has never fully accepted *Hesychasm*: the essence of God can be known, but only in the next life; there can be no distinction between the energy and the essence of God. Today Mount Athos is the well-known center of the practice of *Hesychasm*.

Similarities with Yoga

There are striking similarities between *Hesychast* practices and Indian *Yoga*. As an aid in meditation, the *yogi* repeats a *Mantra*. His aim is *Samadhi* and he can experience a vision of light.

However, if there are obvious similarities, there are also differences. The techniques of *Yoga* concerning the breath are much more elaborate. In *Yoga* the inner exploration is extended to the regions below the heart, furthermore there is not only a descent movement but also a corresponding ascent movement starting from the *Muladhara Chakra* up through the

spine to the *Kutastha* center between the eyebrows. The *Hesychast*, having once descended into the place of the heart, always remains there and does not return to ascend. *Lahiri Mahasaya* clarifies that the final ascent occurs with the opening of the door of the *Sushumna* and not with subsidiary techniques of ascension. In my opinion the teaching is basically the same.

Similarities with the Dhikr

The practice of *Dhikr* among the *Sufis* implies: [1] Physical positions (touching the chest with the chin.) [2] Breath control (connecting invocation with the movement of breathing.) [3] Movement of the head towards the center of the chest. This involves the descent of the *Prayer* from the lips down to the heart.

Muslim teachers agree with Orthodox teachers in insisting that there can be no external techniques that automatically lead to union with God. For both traditions, what matters is the inner attention to the heart and the understanding that the encounter with the One who is invoked is a *pure gift* on his part.

[III] SUFI

We *kriyabans* have so much to learn from the *Sufis*! Their favorite *Prayer* is "*Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh*". *Lahiri Mahasaya* gave this *Mantra* to his Muslim disciples.⁵ Many *Sufis* use this *Mantra* to practice what they call *Dhikr*, which is exactly the same procedure as in *Kriya* we call *Thokar* but is also what in *Yoga* we call *Japa*.

Practice Dhikr without head movements

Many *Sufis* practice an intimate and silent form of *Prayer* in a state of stillness of the body or while walking: this is called *Dhikr*. This term is commonly translated as "remembrance." It is a form of *Prayer* in which the Muslim expresses his remembrance of God and this remembrance becomes pure *Adoration*. When you open your heart to *Allah* and speak words in His praise, *Allah* fills you with strength and inner peace:

When praying, the individual bows as a human person and gets up as God. (*Al-Junayd*)

By means of the *Dhikr* the seed of remembrance is planted in the heart and nourished daily, until the tree of the *Dhikr* becomes deeply rooted and

⁵ If you prefer to utilize a 12 syllable Mantra you can consider: Allahu la ilaha illa huwal hayyul qayyum (Allah—there is no god except He—is the Living One, the All-sustainer.) A good division into 12 parts is: 1- AL 2- LA 3-HU 4-LA 5-ILAHA 6- ILLA 7- HU 8-WAL 9-HAY 10-YUL 11-QAY 12-YUM

produces its fruit. The *Sufi* explain to us that the purpose of *Dhikr* is to purify heart and soul so that we can move towards the light of the Divine without being diverted from anything. *Dhikr* is something of tremendous importance.

The practice of *Dhikr* begins by repeating the *Prayer* audibly (*Dhikr* of the tongue) until a state of great absorption makes it impossible to continue in this way. At this point the mental practice begins. Carrying it out assiduously, putting passion and concentration into it, even the syllables pronounced mentally are canceled from the conscience and only the meaning of the *Prayer* remains. The mind becomes so calm that it cannot think, while the deepest feelings are awakened instead – the touch of the Divine Remembrance drives the mind crazy: then the most intoxicating of joys explodes.

"Heavens and earth contain Me not, but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me."

(*Prophet Muhammad conveying the words of God – Hadith Kudsi.*)

The simplest way to practice turns out to be the best.

"When a servant of *Allah* utters the words "*Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh*" (There is none worthy of worship except Allah) sincerely, the doors of heaven open up for these words until they reach the Throne of *Allah*."

Practice of Dhikr accompanied by head movements

Let us consider those procedures in which the chanting of "*Lâ Ilâha Illâ Allâh*" is accompanied by the movements of the head.

We do not have the exact details of this procedure but it seems reasonable that the *Prayer* and the head be raised (with or without the aid of the breath) from below the navel up to the brain; after reaching the brain, the *Prayer* is moved from the brain to one shoulder, then to the other and then strike the heart.

Some *Sufi* order explains that whoever wants to guide the *Prayer* in the heart, must first keep the tongue pressed against the palate, lips and teeth firmly clenched and hold the breath. Then starting with the syllable with "*Lâ*", the *Prayer* rises with the inhalation from the navel to the brain.

After "*Lâ*" is placed in the head, holding the breath, "*Ilaha*" is placed in the right shoulder (and in the upper right part of the chest under the right shoulder) with the head bending to the right; "*Illaal*" is placed in the left shoulder (and in the upper left chest under the left shoulder) with the head bending to the left. Then "*lâh*" is driven strongly into the heart with the head bending forward. As you lift your chin you exhale. Then you hold back, "*La*" is again placed in the head. The movements and the

Mantra are repeated again and again for many many times. As the number of repetitions of the technique increases in intensity, a deep intoxication is felt in the heart.

At the end of the chosen number of repetitions, the phrase *Muhammad Rasool Allah* is done by moving the head from the left to the right side, and finally it is said: "*My God, Thou art my goal and satisfying Thee is my aim.*"

If you want to follow the *Sufi* path and at the same time use the *Kriya* techniques, you will not encounter any difficulties. Clearly you must have a strong self-taught spirit.

You can respect the repetition numbers given in *Kriya* schools or you can go beyond them in a completely different dimension. *Sufi* practice a number of repetitions which is inconceivable for a *kriyaban*.

For a good practice of this *Dhikr* it is recommended to adopt the correct attitude: it is not a question of preparing to experience something tremendously powerful but that of getting lost in the beauty of the *Prayer*, of the *Mantra*. This is what the *Sufi* do!

In *Sufi* literature we find ardent sentiment of the soul and sincerity. The celebration of the Creator of the universe shines with unparalleled strength and breadth. The *Sufi* tell us of their love for the Beauty that is found on this earth, letting you guess how their ardent form of *Prayer* takes them from the contemplation of this Beauty to the direct experience of the Divine.

Consider how great the inspiration we get from these verses of Rumi:

I died as a mineral and became a plant; I died as plant and rose to animal;
I died as animal and I was Man. Why should I fear? When was I less by
dying? Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar with angels blessed; but
even from angel-hood I must pass on: all except God doth perish. When I
have sacrificed my angel-soul, I shall become what no mind e'er
conceived. (*Rumi, Translated by A.J. Arberry*)

[IV] RADHASOAMI

The *Radhasoami* (Radha Swami) movement also has many similarities to the *Kriya* path. It is reasonable to consider the fact that some disciples of *Lahiri Mahasaya* could have belonged to this movement and perhaps, without being perfectly aware of it, had added to *Kriya* some elements of theory and practice that belonged to it. *Sri Yukteswar* and P.Y. they were part of this movement.

Radhasoami is a monotheistic religion which has the *Omkar* reality

as the "One God." We know that the *Kriya* path is a process of refinement, in progressive stages, of being in tune with the *Omkar* vibration. *Omkar* is the final goal of *Kriya*, the only essence that permeates each of its phases. Well this is the same goal that we find in the *Radhasoami* path.

The *Radhasoami* spiritual organization was formally founded in the 19th century in India and is also known as *Sant Mat* (Path of the Saints). It is considered a derivation of *Sikhism*. In fact, this tradition is much older and goes back to the teachings of *Kabir* and *Guru Nanak*.

There was also a group of teachers who assumed prominence in the northern part of the Indian sub-continent around the thirteenth century. Their teachings are distinguished theologically by inner devotion to a divine principle, and socially by an egalitarianism opposed to the qualitative distinctions of the Hindu caste hierarchy and the religious differences between Hindus and Muslims. In modern times the first name to report is that of *Param Sant Shiv Dayal Singh ji* who in January 1861 (the same year in which *Lahiri Mahasaya* said he received initiation into *Kriya Yoga*) created the *Radhasoami* movement. The founder died in 1878 in Agra, India. He did not appoint a successor, resulting in a succession crisis after his death. Some disciples were considered to be his successors, which led to divisions within the group. These fractures led to the propagation of *Radhasoami* teachings to a wider audience albeit with slightly different interpretations.

Practical teachings: how to get started

Meditation takes place in the quiet of the early morning (before breakfast) and before going to sleep. Meditation begins by relaxing the body and making it quiet. The position is comfortable whether sitting in a chair or in a cross-legged position with the spine straight. It is important to gradually develop the ability to sit relaxed and without any physical tension.

The teacher gives the disciple a *Mantra*: its repetition helps the mind to come to complete rest. Repeating the *Mantra* internally in *Kutastha* helps to raise the consciousness of the Ego into higher regions. This is the key that helps to transcend thought (time and space) and to open the door of the inner being. Disciples are invited to use the "5 Names of God": *Jot Niranjan, Ongkar, Rarankar, Sohang, Sat Nam*.

We sit quietly, eyes closed, mentally repeating the *Mantra* and looking into the central part of the darkness that lies ahead. If you perceive the inner light, the concentration is on it. Breath is natural and free flowing. This process automatically draws the spiritual currents, which are normally dispersed and dissipated throughout the body, towards the spiritual center.

It is explained that the seat of the Spirit is located at the point

between the eyebrows. It is on it that the disciple having closed his eyes must focus his attention.

In *Radhasoami* we do not find the exercise of *Talabya Kriya* but only the following instruction: "Turn your tongue back to touch the roof of the palate. Get the tongue to touch the uvula and contact *Amrita* (the divine nectar) which is constantly flowing through the body. Go further and enter the nasal passage. Nectar is usually experienced only after a lot of practice." This nectar is said to be the "living water", the "bread of life" that Jesus spoke of.

Listening to inner sounds

The *Radhasoami* teaching is easier than various spiritual teachings described in the ancient scriptures: it requires nothing more than sitting quietly looking and listening within. It is explained that no other system leads so easily to the higher regions of mystical experience. It is taught that there is no other means of spiritual liberation, such as the *Omkar* experience. No one can ever escape the web of *Karma* and reincarnation, or ever become free and happy without this real participation in the current of life that is heard internally.

In order to begin an upward journey, a devotee must learn to "withdraw within." The procedure involves focusing on the primal vibration that sustains the Universe, the so-called "Music of the Spheres." To hear the "divine sound", novices are asked to block their ears with their thumbs in order to block out external sounds. This technique is practiced using an arm support.

You can hear the inner sounds – the same ones described in the *Kriya* literature. The inner sounds are heard starting with those coming from the right side of the head and then from the top of the head. At some point, they begin to enchant the devotee by drawing him upward with an increasing power. Then this sound becomes like that of a bell. One listens to it with rapt attention and deep delight, completely absorbed in it. One would never want to give up listening to this sound.

Use the breath to intensify the Omkar experience.

There are many variations of this procedure adopted by different *Radhasoami* groups. Here I mention a variant that represents, in my opinion, the most effective and efficient way to immerse yourself in the *Omkar* dimension.

Inhale slowly, deeply, through your nose, and then slowly exhale, but before all the air is out start breathing in again, and continue like this, never letting all the air out. Feel two currents in the right and left lobe of the brain, respectively. The current linked to the inhalation rises to the right, the one linked to the exhalation goes down to the left. You can

actually hear the sound of the breath coming in and out as "*So Ham*": "*So*" inhaling and "*Ham*" exhaling. The Divine Word is the sound produced by the breath. This technique, in the classical literature of *Yoga*, is known as *Kewali Kumbhaka* due to the fact that if one is constantly aware of the breath and of *So Ham*, he reaches the breathless state.

This perception, if repeated for a long time, will help you to perceive the astral sounds in the inner part of each ear. You will hear the inner sounds in the right ear, then in the left as well.

By means of a long practice of this breathing, you will hear a ringing about an inch above the right ear. Then you will also hear it above the left one. It will take you about five minutes to hear both sounds at the same time.

Each breath should give more energy to this circular motion. Feel a counterclockwise movement within the central part of the brain (when viewed from behind.) When the energy is balanced, a circular force field is formed. Hear both sound vibrations coming from the ears in the center of the brain, where they meet and merge into a slightly different sound. At the climax of this procedure you will get the revelation of the spiritual eye. When the breath disappears, the movement proceeds only by the power of concentration. The white spiritual light appears in the central part of the head. Get absorbed in it. A deep sound of Bell will guide you in the state of *Samadhi*. This is the culmination of this particular practice.

The Chakras

The *Radhasoami* movement believes that in addition to the 6 *Chakras* in the physical body, there are 6 *Chakras* in the gray matter of the brain and 6 in the white matter. The 6 spinal *Chakras* are materialistic in nature and therefore they should not be stimulated (particular *Bija Mantra* are not used to activate them as in *Kundalini Yoga*) but only astrally localized. Strange as it may seem, the long meditations on the *Chakras* are not the correct action to take to achieve "*Mukti*" (liberation.) Instead, by astrally locating them we acquire the ability to leave the body at will – a practice sometimes referred to as "dying while living."

The technique consists in assuming the *Kechari Mudra*, in focusing the inner gaze in *Kutastha*, while part of the attention identifies the seat of a *Chakra* until its particular luminous vibration begins to appear. When this happens, we don't focus on that *Chakra*, but we focus on the location of the next *Chakra*, and so on. In other words, the pause on a *Chakra* therefore lasts just long enough to have a subtle perception of it.

The location of the other 12 *Chakras* in the brain is gradually revealed by moving the *Prana* in a circular fashion in the brain. A very subtle breath can only be used at the beginning of this procedure, then the breath is forgotten and pure willpower is used only.

[This is, in other words, *Swami Hariharananda's* teaching of the *Third Kriya* (see chapter 14).]

After completing a large number of these rounds, the soul has sufficient strength to penetrate the eighteenth "*Portal*": this is the highest *Chakra* whose seat is in the white part of the brain. This *Portal* opens onto the true, indestructible ocean of the Spirit. This is the ultimate goal to be achieved through meditation practices.

Kabir and Guru Nanak inspired the Radhasoami movement

The teachings of *Kabir* [1398 Benares - 1448/1494 Maghar] bear a profound resemblance to the *Radhasoami* teaching. The concept of "*Shabda*" that we find in the writings of *Kabir* and which can be translated as "Word" (the word of the Master) can be related to the *Omkar* teaching. According to *Kabir* this *Shabda Om* removes all doubts and difficulties: it is vital to keep it continuously, as a living presence, in our awareness.

The literature on *Kabir* and *Guru Nanak* (1469 Nankana Sahib - 1539 Kartarpur) is of great inspiration. Their teachings can be perfectly overlapped.

Kabir

Illiterate weaver, Muslim by origin, *Kabir* was a great mystic, open to Vedantic and yogic influence, he sang the Divine in an extraordinary way conceiving it beyond any name and form. The poems and sayings attributed to him are expressed in a particularly effective language that remains etched forever in the reader's memory.

In the last century *Rabindranath Tagore*, the great mystical poet of Calcutta, rediscovered the validity of his teachings and the strength of his poetry and made a beautiful English translation of his songs.

Kabir conceived Islam and Hinduism as two converging paths towards a single goal. He was always convinced of the possibility of overcoming the barriers that divide these two great religions. He did not seem to base his teaching on the authority of the holy scriptures; he shunned religious rituals. He taught not to give up life to become a hermit, not to cultivate any extreme approach to spiritual discipline, as it weakens the body and increases pride. God must be recognized internally, in one's soul – as a fire which, if nourished with continuous care, burns, transforming all resistances, dogmas, ignorance into ashes. This appears very well in his saying: "One day my consciousness, like a bird, flew to heaven and entered heaven. When I arrived, I saw that there was no God: in fact, I realized that He was dwelling in the hearts of the Saints!"

From Hinduism *Kabir* received the concept of reincarnation and the law of *Karma*, from Islam he took absolute monotheism and the strength to

fight the concept of caste and all forms of idolatry. I found in him the full meaning of the *yogic* experience; he affirms that in our body there is a garden full of flowers, the *Chakras*, and invites us to establish consciousness in the *thousand petal Lotus* from which to contemplate infinite beauty.

Who is there playing upon a flute in the middle of the sky? The flute is being played in *trikuti* (eyebrows center), the confluence of the Ganga and Jamuna. The sound emanates from the north! Cowherd girl, hear the sound of the flute and lo, they are all hypnotized by the *nada*." "It is a music without strings which plays in the body. It penetrates the inner and the outer and leads you away from illusion." (*Kabir*).

Guru Nanak

Beloved *Guru Nanak* gave the same teaching. He disapproved of ascetic practices and instead taught to remain internally detached by living the life of the householder. "Asceticism is not in the clothes of an ascetic, or in the walking stick, nor in visiting burial places. Asceticism is not in mere words; asceticism is remaining pure in the midst of impurities!"

Traditionally, liberation from worldly slavery was the goal, so the life of the landlord was considered a hindrance and an obstacle. In contrast, in *Guru Nanak's* teaching, the world became the arena of spiritual endeavor. He was enchanted by the beauty of creation and regarded the landscape of nature as the most beautiful setting for the worship of the Divine. He wrote his teachings in *Punjabi*, the spoken language of Northern India. His disregard for *Sanskrit* suggested that his message made no reference to existing scriptures. He strove to totally free his disciples from all ritual practices, orthodox ways of worship and the priestly class.

His teaching required a completely new approach. While a full understanding of the Divine is beyond human beings, he described God as not completely unknowable. God must be seen through the "inner eye", sought in the "heart": he emphasized revelation through meditation. In his teachings there are hints to the possibility of listening to an ineffable Inner melody (*Omkar*) and of tasting the nectar (*Amrit*).

"The Sound is inside us. It is invisible. Wherever I look I find it."
(*Guru Nanak*).

In conclusion, the *Radhasoami* movement deserves our respect: there are teachings in it that beautifully complement *Lahiri Mahasaya's* legacy.

Conclusion

We have considered four mystical paths. Now, suppose we find ourselves

in trouble with our *Kriya* path. This difficulty can arise from different causes: having little time to practice, being able to practice only *First Kriya*, believing that you have obtained few results ... Well let's focus on our difficulty, keep it in mind and with this awareness let's reread one by one slowly the four paths described.

I have no doubt that in at least one of these we will find a clue, a clarification that will become a bright intuition on how to overcome the problem you have. We will feel the reality of the concrete experience of one or more saints who followed that tradition and their example will inspire us to behave like them. Let us choose the path that most inspires us and let us be guided in a research on that theme, tackled with the means that progress in the current dissemination of knowledge offers us. Let's light the flame that had brought us on the path of *Kriya* again in our heart.

CHAPTER 13

INCREMENTAL ROUTINE

Chapters 10 to 13 of this third part of the book have the following overall title: *How to Avoid Failure on the Spiritual Path*. This is a problem that has always struck me having seen some very serious and motivated people who after a few years of practice have abandoned *Kriya*.

In order to avoid this situation, I talked about *Japa* which is a concrete help to obtain a great satisfaction from *Pranayama*: the breathless state. If you who are reading these lines have decided to abandon your *Kriya* practice for various reasons, wait a moment and consider what I propose to you in this chapter.

I would like to write about the usefulness of practicing an incremental routine of any *Kriya* technique. This is an experience through which one can take a big step towards a new vision of the *Kriya* path.

We have already encountered an incremental routine in chapter 9: the one that concerns the practice of *Tribhangamurari Thokar* – but this practice requires preparation (*Amantrak* and *Samantrak*) that few feel like going through. I want to offer you something simpler here.

Let's first clarify what an incremental routine is. It is certainly not what is recommended to one who begins to practice *Kriya*. The beginner is advised to practice the same set of techniques daily, without changing their order of practice and the number of repetitions. At least in the first three months they are taught to proceed in this way.

But, if after a couple of years of applying the same routine, you find that your efforts have been totally ineffective and that the initial enthusiasm has been lost, I recommend you to use your time in a different way. Allow me to explain a chance to be reborn on the spiritual path by practicing intensely but only one day a week.

Theoretically one should continue the practice of *Kriya* while going through apparently unproductive phases. But what to say to all those *kriyabans* who reach a stalemate where further progress seems impossible? For them the idea of having to practice *Kriya* daily for a lifetime becomes a nightmare, a cage from which they want to escape. This is easily understood.

The dogmatic *kriyabans* would pronounce: "You are too attached to the results. Even if it seems to you that *Kriya* does not work, be loyal to it and continue undeterred as you have done up to now." Perhaps they would tell the story of that loyal *kriyaban* who had his first spiritual experience only towards the end of his life, just hours before leaving the body!

Now, an *Incremental Routine* consists in mainly using a single technique whose number of repetitions is gradually increased until reaching a large number of repetitions whose amount has been handed down to us by the *Kriya* tradition. Each step of this demanding practice takes place only one day a week. After completing this process one can take a break and then consider another technique and apply the same procedure to it.

I open a parenthesis: think about what happens in athletics. There are points in common between *Kriya* and the essence of athletics. Both shun the use of brute force, both take advantage of setting specific goals and diligently channeling their strength towards achieving them. Both require you to evaluate your own way of performing in order to learn from experience.

Now, what happens in athletics gives us a good example that I ask you to reflect on. Athletes who wish to achieve noteworthy goals must somehow increase the intensity and quality of their practice. Only through very intense sessions, where they push their degree of physical and mental resistance to the maximum, can they provide otherwise unattainable performance. This is a "law" that no one escapes. Of course, each session must be followed by several days of rest in order to achieve total recovery.

Please consider the two examples of incremental routines that I am going to comment on.

[I] Incremental routine of Navi Kriya

Choose any day off and after a very short practice of *Maha Mudra* and *Kriya Pranayama*, practice double the repetitions of *Navi Kriya*. Choose the variant of *Navi Kriya* you prefer.

Start by practicing $4 \times 2 = 8$ repetitions of *Navi Kriya*. The next steps will be 4×3 , $4 \times 4 \dots 4 \times 19$, 4×20 . There is no need to go beyond 4×20 repetitions. You will do these stages once a week. And what will you do during the other days of the week? The answer will surprise you: "Do not practice any *Kriya* technique or be satisfied with a very short practice of it or indulge in the balm of a long and quiet *Japa*."

The increase of this technique must be gradual. If you think you are smart and immediately do many repetitions all in one go, know that it is like doing nothing, because the inner channels are closed. Our inner obstacles cannot be eliminated in one day; our inner strength is not strong enough to dissolve them. This inner power is weak at first and needs to be increased week after week. Furthermore, this process should be integrated with a regular active life.

If you always practice in your room, make sure you enjoy a long

walk in the evening. Everything will proceed harmoniously and you will surely experience the blessing of an inner silence charged with bliss.

It's up to you to make your practice day as enjoyable as possible. I advise you to divide the long sessions into two parts – everything must obviously be completed in one day. You can close each part by lying on a mat in *Savasana* (the corpse pose) for a few minutes. You can start part of the practice in the morning but without rushing, respecting every detail. In the afternoon, after a light meal and a little nap, go out if you can, reach a beautiful place where you can sit and contemplate nature. Then, absorbed in the practice and perfectly at ease, complete the number of repetitions that are missing. You will see how the effects increase as the day approaches twilight.

For the incremental practice of Navi Kriya consider alternatively the variant of it that you find in Appendix n.2

To begin with, you start with 36 descents in the *Dantian*, then $36 \times 2 = 72$ descents. The next steps will be 36×3 , 36×4 ... 36×19 , 36×20 . This is the method that I chose and that I will never stop blessing for its extraordinary power.

Specific effects of the incremental routine of Navi Kriya

Let us remember that *Pranayama* leads to the state where *Prana* and *Apana* meet in the navel and awaken the *Samana* current, the only form of energy that can enter *Sushumna*. We know that *Samadhi* only happens when all the energy enters the *Sushumna*. *Navi Kriya* is primarily designed to lead to this event.

You need to know that with this incremental routine you may experience some tension and doubt that you are doing any useful work. I hope you do not decide to abandon this practice on the pretext that it is not suitable for your physiology.

To understand the meaning of this work, let's try to understand what it means to "cut" the navel knot. It is explained that cutting the umbilical cord at the moment of birth creates a division of a single reality into two parts: the spiritual and the material. The spiritual part, which manifests itself as joy and calm, is located in the higher *Chakras* and in the head; the material part settles in the lower *Chakras*. This separation between "spirit" and "matter" within each human being is a permanent source of tearing conflicts. By means of this *Incremental Routine of Navi Kriya*, the healing of this fracture takes place. Although healing is a harmonious event, what transpires on the outside can be interpreted negatively by others.

The problem is that sometimes harshness may appear in your temperament. You will find yourself saying some things that others find offensive and cutting but that for you, in that moment, are the expression

of sincerity. Backed by a bright inner intuition, you could verbally hurt your friends and only hours later, alone and detached, observe how inappropriate those words were.

Whatever the judgment of others, know that your personality is destined to ideally gather around a central point and all inner conflicts will be healed. In practical life an interior order is established in an ineluctable way; each action seems to be surrounded by a halo of calm and seems to go straight towards the goal. This is reminiscent of Ahab's attitude in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*:

"Swerve me? ye cannot swerve me, ... The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. ... Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way!"

A good effect of this practice is to discover a notable increase in mental clarity, perhaps due to a strong action on the third *Chakra* that governs the thinking process. A more calibrated, precise and clear logical process will arise from this more efficient synergy between thoughts and emotions. Intuition will flow freely and cope with those moments in life when important decisions must be made.

This practice can help you face important and decisive challenges that life places before you. For example, you may feel the need to aim for something that looks like a utopia, something that seems impossible according to common reasoning. Well, the described practice will provide you with the energy potential to achieve this ideal.

Other effects in the field of understanding the spiritual path may indeed be momentous.

[III] Incremental routine of Kriya Pranayama

Let's first answer an obvious question: "Why should I practice the incremental routine of *Navi Kriya* before that of *Kriya Pranayama*? The reason is that *Navi Kriya* creates that solidity which allows one to face the very demanding practice of the *incremental Kriya Pranayama Routine*.

36x1, 36x2, 36x3,... 36x 20 breaths *Kriya* is the best plan. A lighter but still valid plan is: 24x1, 24x2, 24x3,... ..24x 24.

In chapter 6 we have shown 6 different aspects of *Kriya Pranayama*, make sure they are all present. Start with the simpler details and, after a while, introduce the others. When the practice is split into two or three parts – for example between morning and afternoon – it always begins by reconsidering the simpler details.

Go ahead carefully. Respect the rhythm of breathing that suits your constitution. If at certain moments you realize that the breath is actually

quite short, don't worry about it! However, during each phase of the process, it is important to always keep a minimum of breath, until the completion of the number that you have decided to practice on that day. In other words, the process should never become purely mental.

Note 1

During this very delicate period, you can practice *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama* both during the week and on the day of the Incremental Routine practice. Through it you will receive a dramatic transformation – various patterns of energy imbalance disappear. Without this balancing action it is not easy to obtain an *attentive but calm readiness* which is the very basis of the meditative state of *Kriya*. It is a common experience that after a long practice of *Nadi Sodhana*, without adding any other technique, one finds oneself in a meditative state, which arose naturally.

Note 2

Don't be surprised if, at certain moments, this routine becomes an extraordinary journey into memory. In fact, it happens that, by concentrating one's attention on the *Chakras*, a particular effect is obtained: the inner screen of our consciousness begins to show many images. This is a physiological fact and we have every reason to suspect that those who say they are exempt probably do not have enough clarity to notice it.

The *Chakras* are like caskets containing the memory of one's entire life: they give rise to the full splendor of lost reminiscences. The essence of past events (the beauty contained in them and never fully appreciated) is relived in the quiet pleasure of contemplation while the heart is sometimes pervaded by a restrained cry. It is a revelation: the light of the Spirit seems to shine in what seem trivial moments of our life.

Other incremental routines

You can devise several *Incremental Routines*. Each technique practiced intensively will bring about specific effects – perceived particularly in the day following the practice. Some effects can sometimes be a cause for concern. [As I have already pointed out, a *kriyaban* should be familiar with the basic laws of the human psyche.]

If you want to practice an *Incremental Routine* of any technique and you do not have an expert next to you to help you in planning in number of repetitions, remember the following criterion: the first step should work for 15-20 minutes, then, with the following weeks, continue to increase the number of repetitions up to about six hours. If you want to proceed more cautiously and get to a maximum of four hours, that's okay.

Small remark

Through the incremental routines you will have the opportunity to catch errors in your understanding of it and to guess how to correct the error. An incremental routine will give you the strength to abandon the childish attitude of always turning to others for advice and clarification. As you practice, you will receive important clues, especially when you have gone through different stages of the incremental process: certain details of the technique will seem heavy, unbearable, unnatural and therefore you will eliminate them; others will disappear on their own without you even noticing; instead others that seemed non-essential to you will be amplified and deepened with good effects that you could never have imagined. In the days following the long practice sessions, you will intuitively perceive the essence of the chosen technique and gain a deeper understanding of it. You may even significantly change your view on why to practice *Kriya Yoga*.

PART IV: TEACHINGS OF OTHER KRIYA TRADITIONS

CHAPTER 14

KRIYA YOGA IN THE VISION OF SWAMI HARIHARANANDA

In chapter 4 I related how I found *Swami Hariharananda's* teachings. He was a disciple of *Sri Yukteswar* but also received *Kriya* teachings that came from other traditions. His vision of *Kriya* impressed me deeply. I followed his teachings for quite a long time, had wonderful experiences with them.

For the reasons I explain in the last part of this chapter, I finally returned to *Lahiri Mahasaya's* practice of *Kriya Yoga*. However, I keep the essence of what *Swami Hariharananda* taught me in my practice. While in the second part of the book I have described the essence of *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya Yoga*, here I describe *Swami Hariharananda's* teachings as I am convinced that they are precious and there are spiritual seekers who are interested in them.

Note

After the death of *Swami Hariharananda* various *Kriya* schools were formed which spread his teachings. There are slight differences on how they define the teachings: for example some schools call *Third* and *Fourth Kriya* what here I call *Third Kriya* and call *Fifth* and *Sixth Kriya* what here I call *Fourth Kriya*.

OVERALL VIEW

First Kriya Through the daily repetition of this practice, a *kriyaban* experiences contact with the *Omkar* reality. He can perceive the three main aspects of the Divine (inner sound aspect, spiritual light aspect and inner movement sensation) within each *Chakra*. Great importance is given to the *Forward bends* and *Maha Mudra*. On the other hand, there is no emphasis on the perfect execution of *Kechari Mudra*.

In *Kriya Pranayama* the movement of *Prana* always swings between *Muladhara* and *Sahasrara* and not between *Muladhara* and *Medulla* as taught by *Lahiri Mahasaya*. To this technique is added the procedure called "*Kriya Meditation*" which proves to be very effective.

Second Kriya This level should contain the explanation of the *Thokar* technique, but it does not contain it in the way we have described in chapter 8. Great importance is instead given to the practice which, in that chapter, we have called: "*Omkar Technique*". This practice is deepened

with the practice of the "*Second Kriya informal part*". This is a very effective method to guide the *Prana* from the body towards the spinal column, using in a very particular way, exclusive to this school of *Kriya*, repeating each of the *Vasudeva Mantra* syllable a large number of times.

The *Prana* is sucked into the upper part of the head and the *kriyaban* enjoys an ecstatic state and is ready for the last work which will take place in the upper part of the brain and above it.

Third Kriya In this level the *kriyaban* concentrates mainly on the crown of the head and on the *Fontanel*. Head movements are expected at first and then immobility is established. The status that is achieved is very high.

Fourth Kriya The perception of the eighth *Chakra* located above the *Sahasrara* is introduced. The *kriyaban* is instructed on how to reach the state of perfect breathlessness. Once this state has been reached, the consciousness descends from the eighth *Chakra* to the *Cerebellum*, lingers there and then moves to the *Pineal gland* where the spiritual *Light* has its seat.

FIRST KRIYA

[Forward bends – Maha Mudra – Kriya Pranayama – Jyoti Mudra – Paravastha]

In the following techniques the tongue is in the position we have defined as "baby *Kechari Mudra*."

Forward bends

Sit on the floor in the half lotus position or on your heels. Exhale. Focus on *Ajna* in the center of the head. By means of a deep inhalation (not too long) visualize the breath rising from the seat of *Muladhara* up the spine and reaching *Ajna*. Hold your breath. Lean the area above the belt forward and touch the floor with your head – if you can. (The head is placed in the region between the knees. The hands can be used to achieve this position comfortably.)

Gently exhale and let your breath be free. After touching the floor with your forehead, bend to the right first, bringing your right ear closer to the right knee. The head approaches the right knee, the face is turned towards the left knee so that it is possible to feel a pressure on the right side of the head; a sensation of space is felt within the left side of the brain. Stay in this position for 3 to 30 seconds.

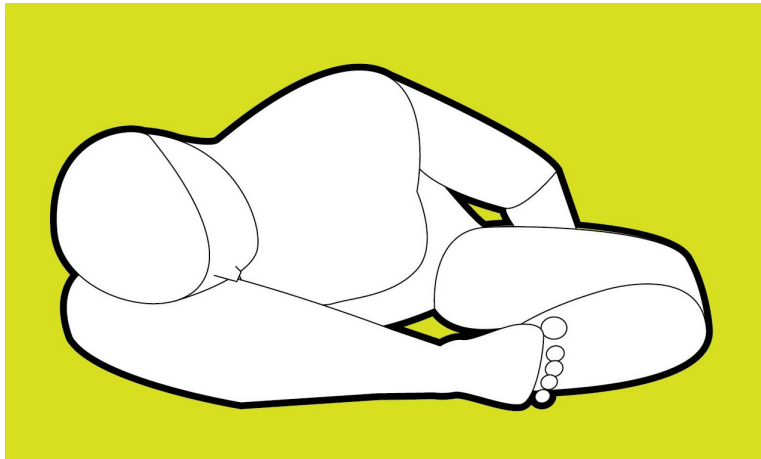


Fig.12 Forward bend. First position
[Sitting on heels is also OK!]

Move your head back towards the center until your forehead touches the ground. Then repeat the same exercise with the other side of the body, exchanging perceptions. The head approaches the left knee, the face is turned towards the right knee so that it is possible to feel a pressure on the left side of the head; a sensation of space is felt within the right side of the brain. Stay in this position for 3 to 30 seconds. Move your head back

towards the center until your forehead touches the ground. A pressure is felt on the forehead. A sensation of space is perceived within the occipital region.

During this delicate process you are breathing normally and your awareness is mainly in *Ajna Chakra* while your eyes are focused on *Kutastha*. Then lift up with your back straight while inhaling deeply.

Through a long exhalation, the energy is guided down from *Ajna Chakra* to *Muladhara*. By means of a deep inhalation visualize the breath which comes from the physical seat of *Swadhisthana* up the spine and reaches *Ajna*. Repeat the whole process as for *Muladhara*. Finally by means of a long exhalation guide your energy from *Ajna* to *Swadhisthana*. Then repeat the same process for *Manipura*, *Anahata*, *Vishuddha* and *Medulla*. This will do six forward bends. With this procedure the perception of *Omkar* reality becomes tangible.

Note

To increase the power of this procedure, you can, when down, hold your breath. You will experience a very strong feeling of energy rising and intensifying at the point between the eyebrows. Breath holding is a powerful *Kundalini* stimulator. If you are not ready to sustain the power generated by this procedure, if you feel "upset" after meditation, or if you feel too irritable, do not hold your breath.

When you bend your body to the right, your left nostril will open. When you bend your body to the left, your right nostril will open. When you lean forward and your forehead is very close to the floor, you will notice an equal flow of breath in your nostrils.

Ida's lunar channel is located on the left side of the spine; the solar channel of *Pingala* is located on the right side of the spine. Both of these channels are attached to the *Sushumna* channel and block its entrance. By repeating the procedure described, the two lateral channels are separated, and, as a consequence, a passage is opened between the two. Thus opens the passage that leads into the spinal cord: the opening of this passage represents the beginning of the practice of meditation.

Maha Mudra

Bend the left leg under the body so that the left heel is close to the perineum. Draw the right knee against the body so that the thigh is as close to the chest as possible. The intertwined fingers are placed just below the knee and this helps to apply pressure to your internal organs. Take 5 to 6 very deep breaths while applying moderate pressure to the knee. Then inhale deeply and hold, extend right leg, lean forward, breathe normally and massage right leg from foot to thigh and buttock.

Then grab the right foot like this: the right hand grabs the toes of the right foot and the left hand grabs the inner side of the right foot (the arch of the foot). The face is turned to the left. Feel a sensation of internal pressure

on the right side of the head. It contrasts with the feeling of free space in the left side of the brain. Chant *Om* six times at the point between the eyebrows. Then inhale and hold, sit back on your left foot with your right knee bent and drawn towards your chest, then exhale in a normal breath.

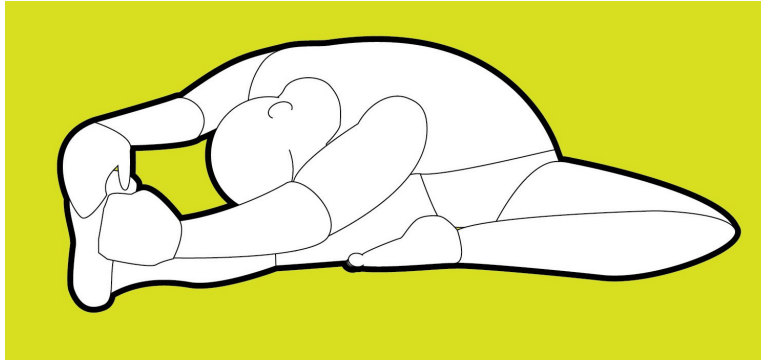


Fig.13 Here the face is turned to the left

Practice the whole procedure by swapping the perceptions and position of the legs and use of the hands. I don't repeat everything – don't forget the *Om* chant six times at the point between the eyebrows.

Now, draw both knees against your body. Extend both legs, bend forward, breathe normally and massage both legs from the feet to the thighs and hips. Then grab both feet: right hand for right toes, left hand for left toes. Breathe normally, flex your feet 4 or 5 times then relax them with your head down as close to your knees as possible. Experience internal pressure on the front of the head. A sensation of space is perceived in the occipital region. Chant *Om* six times at the point between the eyebrows. Then inhale and hold, sit straight and massage your toes, then bring your bent legs back to your chest and exhale. This exercise is repeated three times.

Kriya Pranayama

This school teaches a very particular way of practicing *Kriya Pranayama*: in fact it provides a *Pranayama* as per tradition which is followed by a particular practice called *Kriya Meditation* which is really sweet and offers deep spiritual experiences. There is also a practice for when there are at least three hours available. The latter practice contains the same principles as the previous but involves an even more subtle and shorter breath. Its purpose is to achieve a profound experience of the *Omkar reality*.

[I] Kriya Pranayama basic

This *Pranayama* is the classic one as explained by *Lahiri Mahasaya*, which however differs from it in a detail that we will clarify shortly.

Turn the tip of the tongue back towards the *pituitary gland* in the middle of the head. Start with *Ujjayi Pranayama*. The chin is slightly

lowered and slightly pulled back so that the glottis and throat are partially closed to create resistance to the passage of the breath. Thus the head, body and neck are in a straight line.

Breathe in through your nose slowly producing a long, deep, forceful breath. Exhale in the same way for a length equal to that of the inhalation. The point for drawing in or pushing out the breath is not the nose but the throat. This is the key concept we learned in *Lahiri's Kriya*. Resistance to breathing reduces the speed of the breath, and a hissing sound like that of a cobra is also produced. This sound is automatic and will be audible and last throughout the inhalation and exhalation process.

While taking this breath, the attention moves up and down within the spine. Concentration is therefore not on the breath entering and exiting the lungs. As the breath enters the practitioner moves the attention from the base of the spine up to the *Fontanel*. Thus, with the breath coming out, the practitioner moves the attention from the *Fontanel* to the base of the spine. Reaching the *Fontanel* and not just reaching the *Medulla* is the great change introduced by *Swami Hariharananda's* school.

Then there are other remarks on the breath: first of all it is complete – that is abdominal, thoracic and upper chest. Then there is a very interesting remark on the *Bandhas* that here are practiced in a very subtle way, different from those utilized in *Hatha Yoga*. We remark that the particular position of the chin creates a similar, but milder, effect to that produced by the *Jalandhara Bandha*. It is then observed that making a long and deep exhalation there is a contraction of the anal muscles and the rectus abdominis muscle. In this way *Kriya Pranayama* leads to a passive *Mula Bandha* and *Uddiyana Bandha*. In this way the results in *Kriya* are slow and constant: this fact avoids any problem.

Finally, beginners are taught to inhale along the back of the spine and exhale through the front but when *Prana* begins to be perceived within the spine this initial teaching is no longer needed. It is explained that after a long period of practice the sound of inhalation and exhalation is the same.

As for the number of breaths to be practiced, it is explained that 12 or 24 or 36 are enough: if there is time available it is better to dedicate yourself to the next practice.

The main fact that characterizes this *Kriya Pranayama* is to perceive the *Omkar* reality inside the head. *Swami Hariharananda* conveyed a particular understanding of the entire *Kriya* practice. According to his teaching, the practice of *Pranayama* was to be considered wrong if, after an appropriate number of breaths, the practitioner does not obtain the

perception of the inner sound of *Om* – without the need to close the ears. All *Kriya* practice is a single progressive process of tuning with the *Omkar* reality. Like a thread in which pearls are strung, the *Omkar* perception has to go through all the different phases of *Kriya*. The *Omkar* reality must be perceived not only in the aspect of inner sound and spiritual light but also as a "feeling of swaying, moving or pressing within." Always keeping this teaching in mind helps to deepen the practice in a fantastic way.

[III] Kriya Meditation

Take the position of the tongue we described earlier. Keep part of the consciousness always fixed in the *Fontanel*.

With your eyes closed, inhale by intensifying your concentration in the *Fontanel*. Then exhale as you descend into the *Medulla*. Hold your breath for a few seconds (2-3) and then inhale raising your consciousness back into the *Fontanel*. The rhythm of the breath could be 5 seconds to go down, 2-3 seconds to hold and 5 seconds to inhale.

Here in the *Fontanel* you can have a short pause. Then exhale going down to the fifth *Chakra*, pause for a few seconds, then inhale from the fifth *Chakra* to the *Fontanel*. The times are the same as we have indicated above.

Now exhale to the fourth *Chakra*, then inhale into the *Fontanel* ... and so on. By continuing in this way, at some point you will reach *Muladhara*. Hold your breath for a few seconds. Then inhale up to the *Fontanel*. The times remain the same whatever the *Chakra* you have reached.

Repeat everything in reverse order. Exhale from the *Fontanel* to *Muladhara*. Pause shortly. Then inhale from *Muladhara* to *Fontanel*, pause. Then exhale from the *Fontanel* to the second *Chakra* ... pause ... inhale ... and so on until you exhale from the *Fontanel* to the *Medulla*. This is one cycle (12 breaths). During these movements of the breath it is not necessary to produce the sound in the throat as in the *Pranayama* explained above. Gradually increase the number of cycles until you enter an ecstatic state where you immerse yourself in the *Omkar* dimension.

The practice closes in a very beautiful way. During the last ascent you start from the first *Chakra*, then from the second and so on up to the ascent from *Medulla* to *Sahasrara*. When you arrive at the *Sahasrara*, inhale strongly while crossing the *Fontanel* and do not go down: exhale slowly entering a state of deep meditation without concentrating on anything specific. This state is called *Paravastha*.

Subtle manifestations of light, sound and vibration

After a period of practice of *Kriya Pranayama* and *Kriya Meditation*, the movements of *Prana* are perceived within the spine. At the beginning one can perceive heaviness or rigidity right at the seat of the *Chakras*, then the practitioner perceives *Prana* as a magnetic force of attraction, as if the area were pressed, squeezed due to the energetic attraction. The vibrations of each *Chakra* can be perceived. These sensations are felt first in the *Kutastha* or *Medulla*, then in the fourth *Chakra*. The experience of inner sound and light also takes place.

[III] Kriya meditation with very short breath

The ideal to achieve with this practice is to become aware of 1728 breaths during one single day. As this takes about three hours (the breath gets shorter and shorter) people can only practice it once a week or on special occasions.

On such occasions try, gradually, to get closer to this goal. You can count the breaths on a 108 grain *Mala*. Then try during one whole day to complete 16 *Mala* [$108 \times 16 = 1728$].

Place your consciousness in the *Fontanel*. Observe how a natural inhalation arises, then a short pause is followed by a natural exhalation and so on. Do what you did in the second part, only use an increasingly thin and shorter breath.

There is no rhythm of the breath, any pauses in the breath must exist only if this occurs naturally.

You understand how to proceed: at some point you will reach *Muladhara*. Then you will repeat it all until you get to the *Medulla*. This first cycle (12 breaths) is short: one minute or so. Practice various cycles trying to immerse yourself in the *Omkar* dimension.

You can accompany each breath by the mental chant of an *Om*: "O" by inhaling and "M" by exhaling or in the way that comes most naturally to you or you can simply try to listen to the inner sounds without using any *Mantra*. The important thing is that you enjoy this practice, that nothing disturbs it and that, while the consciousness moves from *Chakra* to *Chakra*, the breath becomes thinner and shorter, almost non-existent.

Remark

Those who are unable to hear the inner sounds should not conclude that there is something wrong with their practice. Perhaps they have made a tremendous effort, the fruits of which will be enjoyed with the practice of the next day or some future day. A sign that one is moving in the right

direction is a sense of mild pressure, such as a feeling of liquid peace on or around the head, often accompanied by a certain buzzing in the occipital region.

Jyoti Mudra

Close your ears with your thumbs while with your index fingers lightly press the corners of your eyes. Concentrate on *Kutastha*. Let some of your attention descend into *Muladhara*. Then ideally raise this *Chakra* through an inhalation at the point between the eyebrows. Hold your breath for as long as it is easy for you (about 10-15 seconds) as you try to perceive the particular light of *Muladhara* in *Kutastha*. Exhale and ideally place the *Muladhara Chakra* in its original position. Part of the attention now shifts to the second *Chakra*. Then do exactly what you did with the *Muladhara Chakra*. Thanks to a short exhalation, this *Chakra* then ideally returns to its seat ...

The same is repeated for *Chakras* 3, 4, 5 and *Medulla*. Always try to perceive the light at the point between the eyebrows. Feel that you are offering each center in the light of the spiritual eye. At the end of the procedure, place your palms on your eyelids and stay there seeing the Light for 2-3 minutes. When the Light disappears, lower your hands.

Paravastha

Paravastha is the state that follows a good *Kriya* practice. Stay longer in meditation by listening to the divine sound, feeling a sensation of movement (vibration) and enjoying the divine Light. Feel the center of your concentration slowly rising from the *Kutastha* to the *Fontanel* and over the *Fontanel* beyond the body. Remain thoughtless as you feel this inner sky starting from the top of your head. When you reach the end of your meditation routine, open your eyes. Gaze at what's in front of you but don't look at anything in particular. Look without looking. Keep 99% of your attention in the *Fontanel*. After a while you will become aware of a thin line of white, soft, fog-like Light around all objects. The Light will progressively expand. Avoid thinking. Keep your gaze fixed. After 5 minutes, close your eyes and stay like that for a little while before standing up.

SECOND KRIYA

When you decide to practice Second Kriya always start with the practice of Forward bends, then Maha Mudra, then Kriya Pranayama.

Then the Second Kriya begins by practicing the formal part of it, which is immediately followed by the informal part. Then you can immediately move on to the practice of Jyoti Mudra in a particular more intense form and you can finally conclude your routine with Paravastha.

[I] Second Kriya formal part

This is a variation of the *Omkar* technique which we described in chapter eight.

Place your hands with interlocked fingers on your abdomen. Inspiration and exhalation are fragmented into 6 + 6 parts. Starting from the position with the chin resting on the chest, inhale while simultaneously lifting the chin slowly as if to accompany and push the energy on its way upwards. Mentally place the syllables of the *Vasudeva Mantra* (*Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya*) in the seat of each *Chakra* making a short pause in each one. During the first "sip" of the inhalation, the concentration is on *Muladhara*, where the syllable *Om* is ideally "placed"; during the second "sip" the concentration is on the second *Chakra*, where the syllable *Na* is ideally "placed"... *Mo* is ideally placed in the third, *Bha* in the fourth, *Ga* in the fifth and *Ba* is placed in *Medulla*. Now the inhalation is complete and the chin is horizontal.

Hold your breath. Practice *Kechari Mudra* as best you can. Tilt the head forward towards the throat cavity: the divine Light flows down from the top in the occipital region of the brain and a certain inner pressure is felt in the front part of the heart *Chakra*.

The head resumes its normal position and immediately bends slightly towards the left shoulder, without turning the face. The previous experience happens again: the divine Light flows from above through the right side of the head and a certain inner pressure is felt in the left side of the heart *Chakra*.

The head resumes its normal position and immediately bends backwards: the same experience of the divine Light occurs by descending through the front part of the head and a certain internal pressure is perceived in the back part of the heart *Chakra*.

Then the head resumes its normal position and bends slightly towards the right shoulder: the experience of divine light occurs through the left side of the head and a certain inner pressure is felt in the right side of the heart *Chakra*. The head resumes its normal position, then the head

tilts forward towards the throat cavity.

During these five push ups, holding the breath, there is no need for any *Mantra*. Then the exhalation guides the awareness through the *Chakras* towards *Muladhara*. The exhalation is also divided into six parts. Slowly lowering the chin to the chest, awareness descends along the spinal column. The syllable *Te* (usually the ending "e" is stretched: *Teee*) is placed in the *Medulla*, *Va* in the fifth *Chakra* ... and so on ... *Su* ... *De* ... *Va*, until *Ya* (stretched: *Yaaa*) is mentally chanted in *Muladhara*.

The overall time of one breath depends on the individual: it is usually around 45 seconds but from a certain point on, the speed of each repetition will slow down. The breath is "sucked in" and appears to be dissolved. From that point on, all the physical details are only hinted at. It should be noted that the different pressures on the heart *Chakra* are much more like an influx of energy quietly descending from above the head region which is different from the typical *Thokar* stimulus we discussed in chapter 8.

You have probably read somewhere that in a deep *Pranayama* energy passes through the *Chakras* like the thread of a necklace passes through pearls. It may also happen that the "thread" of energy envelops each "pearl." The counterclockwise rotation of awareness around the crown (induced by the experience of the Light descending from above) can also be perceived in small dimensions by wrapping around the *Medulla*.

When the exhalation begins and you mentally chant *Teee*, you can use the opening moments of the exhalation to intensify the psychic pressure around the *Medulla*. This inner action naturally extends to the other *Chakras*. The descent path is similar to a helix that surrounds and creates pressure around each *Chakra*. Proceed calmly, do not be in a hurry, so let this process unfold spontaneously.

[III] Second Kriya informal part

Forget the breath. In each *Chakra*, mentally repeat the syllable associated with it many, many times. So in *Muladhara* repeat *Om*, *Om Om*, *Om Om* ... so many times, at least 36. (Don't use *Mala* to count anyway— stay still.) The speed with which you chant the syllables is approximately two every second. Visualize this *Chakra* as a horizontal disk with a diameter of about one inch. Visualize these syllables moving counterclockwise within the *Chakra* near the circumference.

Then focus on the second *Chakra* where you do exactly the same action, using the second syllable of the *Mantra*, that is *Na*, *Na*, *Na*, *Na*, *Na* ... about 36 times. Then you will focus on the third *Chakra*, repeating *Mo*, *Mo*, *Mo*, *Mo*, *Mo* ... about 36 times. Then you will focus on the fourth

Chakra, repeating *Bha, Bha, Bha, Bha, Bha* ... then on the fifth (*Ga, Ga, Ga, Ga, Ga*), then in Medulla (*Ba, Ba, Ba, Ba, Ba*).

Now practice the five head bends but slower.

The head bends forward towards the throat cavity: the divine Light descends from the region above the head (seat of Eternal Tranquility) in the occipital region of the brain and a certain inner pressure is felt on the front of the heart *Chakra*.

After feeling this for 10-20 seconds, return to your normal head position and tilt your head slightly towards your left shoulder. The previous experience happens again: the divine Light flows from above through the right side of the head and a certain inner pressure is felt in the left side of the heart *Chakra*.

After feeling this for 10-20 seconds, resume your normal head position. Now the head tilts back: the same experience of the divine Light occurs by descending through the front part of the head and a certain inner pressure is felt in the back part of the heart *Chakra*. Stay in this position for about 10-20 seconds, then return to your normal position.

Tilt your head towards your right shoulder. The experience of divine light occurs through the left side of the head and a certain inner pressure is felt in the right side of the heart *Chakra*. To close the loop, the head resumes its normal position, then the head bends forward towards the throat cavity. The experience we talked about happens again. Finally the head resumes its normal position.

You have felt the Light and divine blessings in each of the four parts of the brain and a pressure around the heart *Chakra*.

Now concentrate on *Medulla* and repeat *Te Te Te Te Te Te* The state of absorption is very strong indeed. Then you will move on to focus on the fifth *Chakra* using *Va, Va, Va*.... then fourth third.... second *Muladhara*.

Climbing in this way from *Muladhara* to *Medulla* and then descending, always repeating that procedure, constitutes a round: the time required is approximately 4-6 minutes. Repeat 3-4 rounds and then lose yourself in the meditative state.

Key points

[1] As you move from one *Chakra* to the next, you will begin to notice the change in the light vibration in the region between the eyebrows. You will later experience that a specific sound emanates from each center. By remaining absorbed in listening to astral sounds, inner bliss is created, setting aside – at least momentarily – the consciousness of the ego. This is the moment when the *Omkar* reality reveals itself.

[2] After many repetitions of this procedure, the upper brain will ideally remain in space, separate from the physical body. *Swami Hariharananda* said that this procedure ends up separating the upper part of the head from the lower. He compared the head to a coconut and said that this procedure opens the coconut by striking it from four sides. Obviously a lot of effort is required to achieve this. One must really "invite" the divine energy to descend into each part of the head and strive to also feel the pressure on the heart *Chakra*.

During the day stay in this state as much as possible. When you can retreat for a short meditation, tune into the Sound, the Light, the formless power of the Divine revolving within the skull.

Jyoti Mudra Second Kriya

During this practice you contract and relax the muscles near the physical location of each *Chakra*. The position of the hands and fingers is the same used in the *Jyoti Mudra* that we used in *First Kriya*: with your thumbs close your ears while with your index fingers you cover your eyes.

Become aware of the *Muladhara Chakra*. Contract the muscles near the *Muladhara*: the back of the perineum. Then raise this *Chakra* by means of an inhalation to *Kutastha*. Hold your breath as long as possible as long as this does not create discomfort (about 10 -15 seconds) while trying to perceive (in *Kutastha*) the particular light of *Muladhara*. Release the physical tension and exhale.

Then move your awareness to the second *Swadhisthana Chakra* and contract the muscles of the sexual area and the sacrum. You can practice *Vajroli Mudra* (contract and relax the urethral sphincter and back muscles near the sacral center.) Then do exactly what you did with *Muladhara Chakra* ...

When *Swadhisthana* is back in its starting position, focus on the third *Chakra Manipura*. Contract the muscles of the abdomen at the level of the navel: quickly contract and relax the navel, the abdominal muscles and the lumbar area of the spine. Then do exactly what you did with the previous two *Chakras* ...

Repeat the same pattern for *Anahata Chakra*. Expand the chest. Bring your shoulder blades together and focus on your spine, the part near your heart. Feel the contraction of the muscles near the dorsal center. Then do exactly what you did with the previous three *Chakras*

Focus on the fifth *Vishuddha Chakra*. Move your head quickly left-right (without turning your face) a couple of times, perceiving a grinding sound in the cervical vertebrae. This only serves to locate the cervical center. To astrally locate the *Vishuddha Chakra* a different procedure is

needed. Inhale this *Chakra* to the point between the eyebrows without any particular contraction. Now, holding your breath, practice the following five head tilts:

- a) turn the head to the left (hands follow; the slight pressure on the ears and eyes does not change) the right elbow approaches the right side of the chest,
- b) turn the head to the right, the left elbow approaches the left side of the chest,
- c) return to the central position and tilt your head forward,
- d) tilt your head back,
- e) then back to front. Return to normal position. Exhale from *Kutastha* to the *Vishuddha Chakra*.

For the *Medulla* we have the following procedure: inhale very slowly from the base of the spine. During this inhalation, contract the muscles at the base of the spine, then the muscles near the sexual organ, then the muscles near the navel and near the *Manipura Chakra*, then contract the muscles near the dorsal center, near the throat region and finally, clench your teeth and create wrinkles on the forehead. Observe the light at the point between the eyebrows. Feel that you are offering your sixth center to God. Exhale and release the contraction.

For the *Sahasrara Chakra* we have the following procedure. Inhale, contract all the centers as we did for *Ajna Chakra*, then with clenched teeth, push the portion of your head that is above the eyebrows (skull) up into the heavens, offer it to the Divine. Exhale, and release the contraction.

To complete the procedure, place your palms on your eyelids and stay there, observing a milky white light for 2-3 min. When the Light disappears, lower your hands and bow your forehead and pray to your preferred form of God. Open your eyes but stay focused internally in the pituitary gland and see the divine Light in all things. Then enjoy *Paravastha* as in *First Kriya*.

THIRD KRIYA

When you decide to practice the Third Kriya always start with the practice of the Forward bends, then of Maha Mudra, then of Kriya Pranayama. You can also practice Second Kriya or skip it and go straight to Third Kriya practice. In the end always practice Jyoti Mudra and Paravastha

First part: particular form of Pranayama

In this part there are only three *Chakras* that are stimulated: *Anahata*, *Vishuddha* and *Ajna*. This *Pranayama* is practiced 12 times in the following way: during the inhalation concentrate only on *Anahata*,

Vishuddha and *Ajna* by mentally chanting in them the syllables *Bha*, *Ga* and *Ba*. This inhalation is not fragmented but it is continuous. The exhalation is also continuous: during it you focus on *Ajna*, *Vishuddha* and *Anahata* mentally chanting the syllables *Tee*, *Va* and *Su* in them.

Second part: circulation of energy within the brain

Forget the breath. Practice *Kechari Mudra* as best you can. Tilt your head forward.

Feel the energy in the frontal region of the head and mentally vibrate *Bha* in that area. Without returning the head to its normal position, now slowly guide the head into the bent position towards the left shoulder – as if you were trying to touch the left shoulder with the left ear. Having reached this position, feel the energy present on the left side of the brain, above the left ear and mentally vibrate *Ga* in that place.

From this position, tilt your head back and slowly guide the flow of energy to the occipital area of the brain. Once this position is reached, *Ba* mentally vibrates in this area. Then slowly guide the head to the next position, bent towards the right shoulder – as if you were trying to touch the right shoulder with your right ear. Having reached this position, feel the energy present on the right side of the brain, above the right ear and mentally vibrate *Tee* in that place.

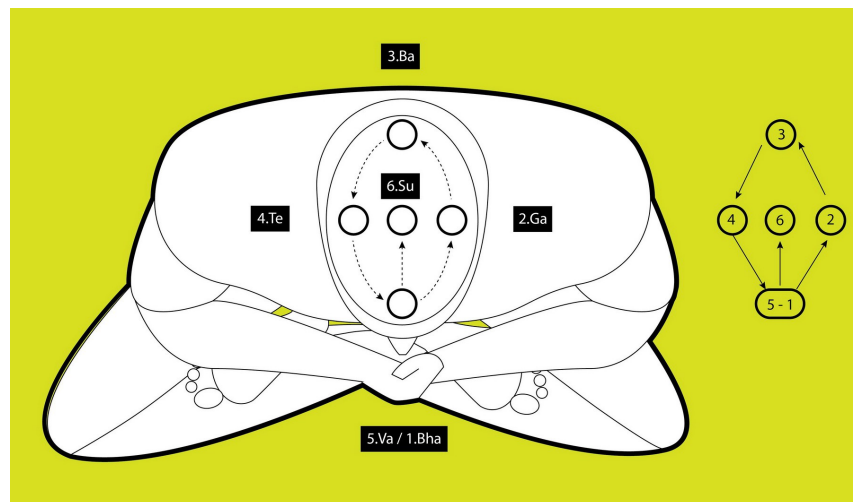


Fig.14 Circulation of calm Prana in the upper part of the brain

Now slowly return to the starting position with your head tilted forward. The flow of energy moves to the frontal region of the brain. Reached this position, mentally vibrate *Va* to that area. Now slowly straighten your head to return with the chin parallel to the ground as you guide your attention back to the central part of the brain under the *Fontanel*. Now mentally chant *Su* in that center. This completes the first round. Repeat this practice 12 times.

It is explained that this rotation of energy, this slow movement through the substance of the brain creates a *psychic pressure* in it. It is explained that this inner pressure, this friction, favors the manifestation of the Divine Light.

Third part: circulation of energy in the state of immobility

After having completed the required number of rotations, it is not difficult to add this last part in which the energetic movement happens in immobility. Breathe naturally. Repeat mentally, without hurry and without moving your head, the syllables *Bha, Ga, Ba, Te, Va, Su* trying to perceive the same energetic movement you have previously induced. A ball of Light is turning inside your brain. After each round, this Light comes internally under *Fontanel*. Practice about 36 rounds during each *Kriya* routine.

Note

These two last practices create a very strong effect. In a merciless way you become aware of the ego's subtle tricks that drive human actions. The reason for many wrong decisions appears with a definitive clarity, free of all covering veils. The ego is a very complicated mental structure: it is not possible to destroy it, but it can be made transparent. There is a price to pay: there might appear (hours after the practice) inexplicable waves of fear, the sensation of not knowing where you are and where you are directed to. This is a natural reaction coming from some subtle layers of the brain you have touched.

If you feel unfocused or spacey – as if you were under the influence of drugs, experiencing a state of too much *detachment* from the world and from *worldly things* – then it is wise to complete the practice with some repetitions of *Second Kriya*, both the formal part of it (6 repetitions) and the informal part (3 repetitions.)

Fourth part: involvement of the various Chakras

This practice is the happy crowning of the effort done with the two previous techniques. It makes the cosmic sound of *Om* to naturally rise and be perceived by your enchanted awareness. You will listen only to this. Therefore the mental chanting of *Bha Ga Ba Te Va Su* is of no utility. The same will happen with the following three last procedures. You will focus only upon *Omkar* sound and won't need any *Mantra* chanting.

Focus on *Muladhara*. Inhale deeply and ideally lift this *Chakra* in the central part of the brain, under *Fontanel*, over *Ajna Chakra*. Visualize that *Chakra* as a disk, large as the circulation of energy that you have previously created.

Feel that the air is squeezed from the abdomen and stored in the upper part of the lungs. Hold your breath and start to put into motion the rotation of the energy in the head just as you have learned to do previously.

The rotation of the energy happens in the head but, at the same time, it happens also around the real location of the *Muladhara Chakra* at the base of the spine.

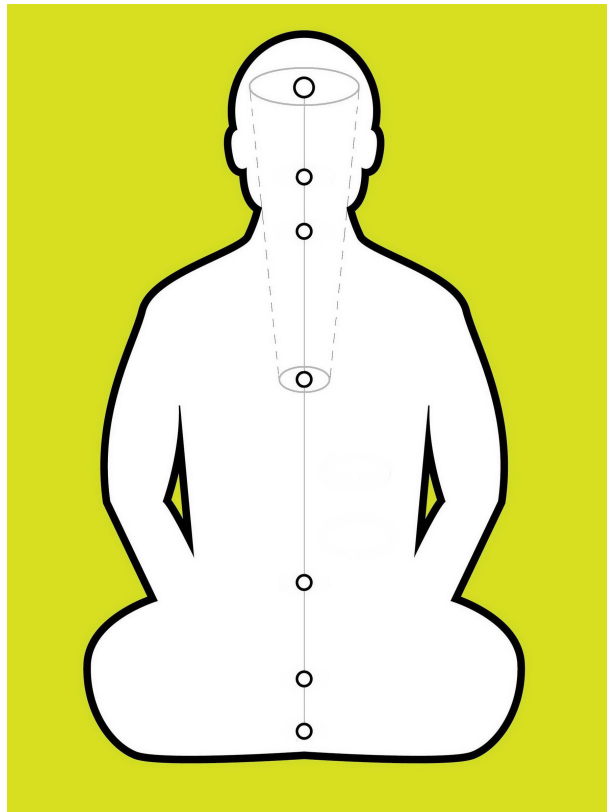


Fig.15 Here we are acting upon the heart Chakra

Hence, two rotations of energy happen at the same time: it seems difficult but it will become natural. [Remember also that at the end of each circle, the flow of energy is directed inside toward the point under *Fontanel*.] During this practice listen to the *Omkar* sound.

The ideal number of rotations associated with each *Chakra* is 36 but a beginner is contented with a smaller number. Usually the need to breathe will disappear. Exhale when you need to exhale and guide the *Muladhara Chakra* back to its location at the base of the spine. Inhale raising the second *Chakra* and repeat the procedure...

Repeat the procedure for each *Chakra* up to *Ajna*. Repeat it again for *Ajna* and then for all the other *Chakras* down to *Muladhara*. The practice ends by breathing freely, putting all the attention in the *Fontanel*. Peace, internal joy, breathless state, listening to internal sounds, perceiving the spiritual

Light... this is what you will experience. Your practice of *Kriya* will become a love story with Beauty itself.

After a certain period of time, a remarkable experience of *Kundalini* awakening will happen. It will overcome you when you rest in the supine position. Without experiencing any start of surprise, you will find yourself ferried from a sweet dream to an authentic heaven; you will return to daily life with tears in your eyes – tears born of endless devotion.

When you master this procedure – when effortless *Kumbhaka* stabilizes – then you will perceive the entire universe filled with the effulgence of Divine Light. The effect is that during the day, a state of never before experienced clarity of mind will surprise you. The foundation of your consciousness will be perceived as a continuous joy, having no reason whatsoever.

Note

It is perfectly natural to approach this practice by slightly rotating your head (and also by mentally chanting the six syllables of the *Mantra*.) Although this is not required, this might be useful for beginners. If this happens, try to move gradually toward physical immobility and toward listening to actual *Omkar* Sound.

FOURTH KRIYA

When you decide to practice the Fourth Kriya, always start with the practice of the Forward Bends, then Maha Mudra, then Kriya Pranayama. You can also have a short practice of the Third Fourth Kriya or skip it and immediately move on to the practice of the Fourth Kriya. In the end always practice Jyoti Mudra and Paravastha

Preliminary practice: dissolving the breath in Brahmaloka

The 8th *Chakra* is the door that gives you the power to get in touch with the astral body.

Its opening implies the cleaning of what holds us back to the reincarnation system or worn-out psychological patterns. It is the center of spiritual compassion and spiritual self-denial. A *kriyaban* who realizes the essence of this *Chakra*, develops the quality of altruism and lives in the dimension of compassion and not of judgment. Some teachers of *Kriya* or *Kundalini Yoga* explain that this *Chakra* is located 5-6 centimeters above the *Fontanel*. Others say: 8 cm., 30 cm., 60 cm. You have to trust your perception.

Gently swing the trunk and head left and right with the center of attention above the head until you feel this *Chakra*. This is the right location!

Inhale, slowly raise *Prana* and awareness from *Muladhara* to the 8th *Chakra*. During this action, do not focus on any other *Chakra* in the spine. Move upward feeling distinctly that the energy passes through the *Fontanel* and reaches the 8th *Chakra*.

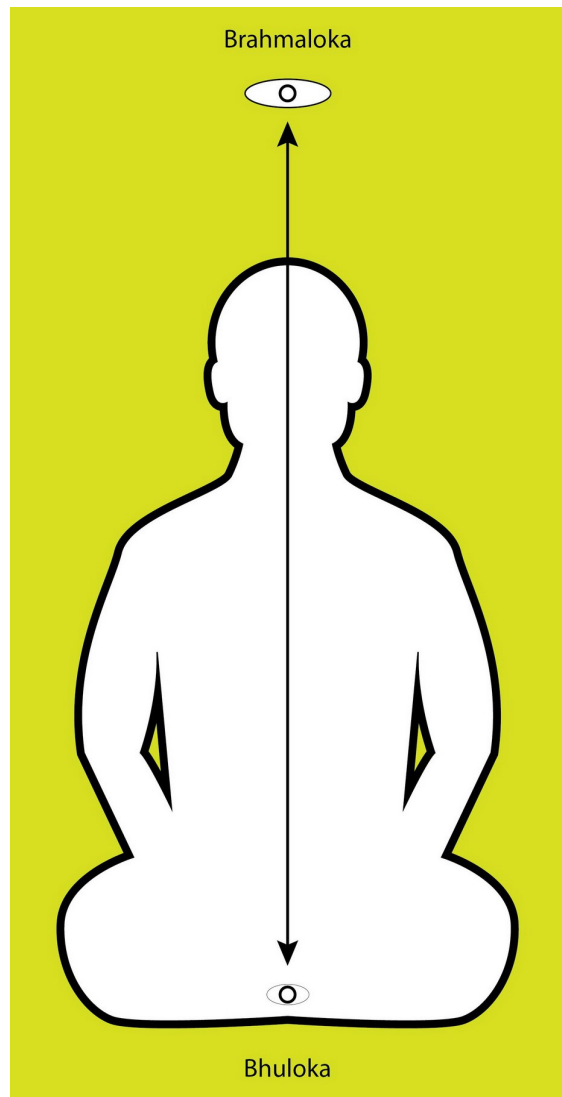


Fig.16 The breath moves between Bhuloka and Brahmaloka and then dissolves

Concentrate there and enjoy the state of balance between inhalation and exhalation. Exhale slowly, letting the *Prana* descend from the 8th *Chakra* to *Muladhara*. (You distinctly feel the energy going down through the *Fontanel*.) When you feel the need to inhale, repeat the procedure. Repeat many, many times until your state of consciousness has totally changed and your breathing is very subtle, almost non-existent.

Now breathe in gently from *Muladhara* to the eighth *Chakra*, lifting breath and *Prana*. Breathe out gently from the eighth *Chakra* down along the spine but do not intentionally descend to *Muladhara*. Observe how the current linked to the exhalation spontaneously reaches a point in the spine.

This point is not necessarily one of the various *Chakras*. Wherever this point is, it becomes the starting point of the next inhalation. Then inhale from it, up to the 8th *Chakra*.

The length of the route is now obviously shorter. Focus again on the state of balance between inhalation and exhalation. Breathe out gently down the spine: probably the current linked to the exhalation will make an even shorter path than the previous one. Now there is a new starting point. Inhale from this new point and go up to the 8th *Chakra* ...

By repeating this procedure you will reach a particular mental and physical condition in which you will remain breathless while the concentration will be totally on the 8th *Chakra*. If, after a long pause, the breath appears again, repeat the whole process from the beginning, (inhaling from *Muladhara*.) Continue patiently and unperturbed. It is about making the breath cease by entering a dimension where it is no longer needed.

Fourth Kriya proper: meditation on the Cerebellum

Rotate the consciousness around the 8th *Chakra*. Observe a sphere of Light that circulates around the 8th *Chakra* and then touches the center of this *Chakra*. Repeat this perception a few times without mentally chanting any *Mantra*.

Then let the sphere of Light (after having traced a circle around the 8th *Chakra*) does not come inside it but comes down, obliquely, crossing the *Fontanel*. As the beam descends raise your the chin; feel that this ray reaches the *Cerebellum*. Remain motionless for a few seconds, completely immersed in the intensity of the dazzling white Light that shines from there throughout the brain.

Locate the *Cerebellum* with your awareness. Lower your chin without losing focus on the Light. Now rotate the totality of your awareness counterclockwise around the *Cerebellum* at medium speed.

Go deeper and deeper. Don't go too fast or too slow. Do this intensely many times until you feel a change in your state of consciousness and mood. Do this for some time maybe 2-3 minutes no more. After that, stay in this state for a few seconds and open your eyes. Stay there for a moment, and then repeat the procedure. Gradually, over the next few days, you can repeat the experience a few times.

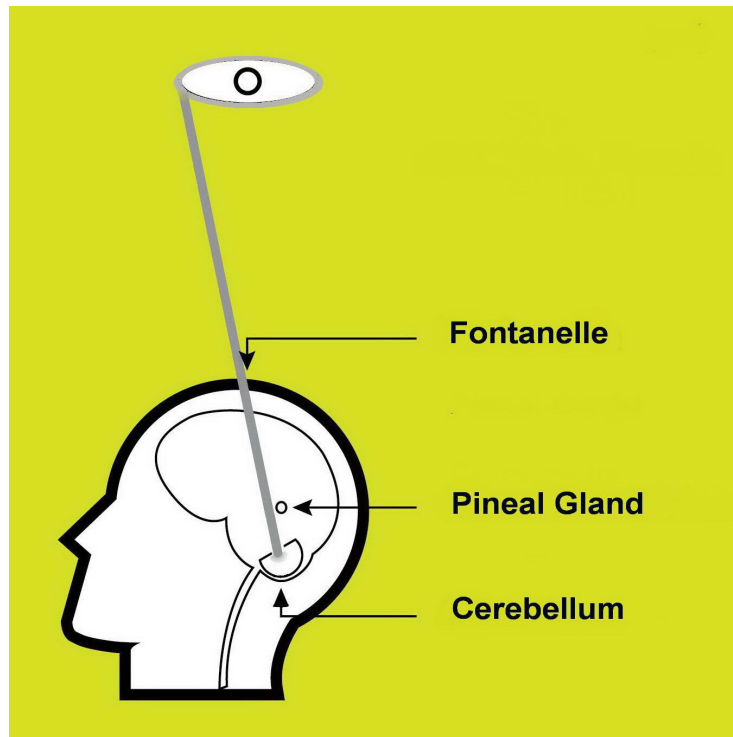


Fig.17 The Light moves from the 8th Chakra to Cerebellum

Meditation on the Pineal gland

Now slowly raise your chin (just a few millimeters) until you feel tension in the nape of your neck. Intuitively condense the Light you are experiencing and direct it towards the *Pineal gland*. This gland is very close to the cerebellum, but slightly forward and above, along a line that forms a 60 ° angle (with the floor.) The movement should only be hinted at, without any muscle tension: there is a kind of inner tension that intuitively guides you towards the *Pineal gland*.

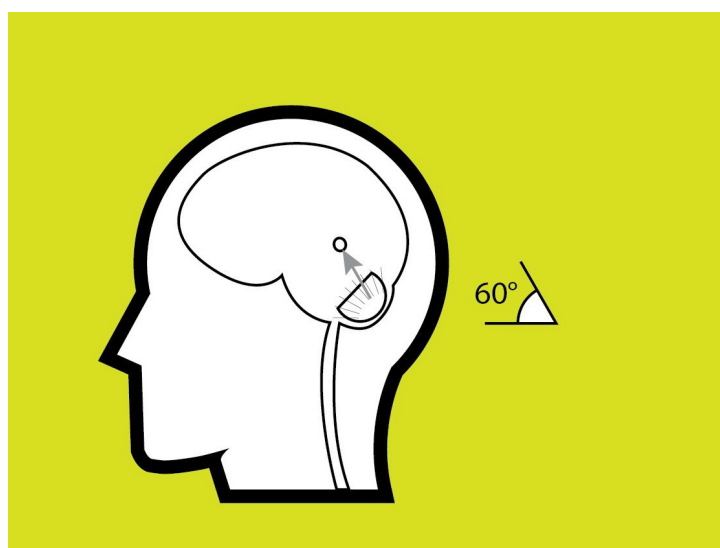


Fig.18 The Light moves from the Cerebellum to the Pineal gland

Rotate the totality of your awareness counterclockwise around the *Pineal gland* at medium speed. You will feel a change in your state of consciousness. Stay in this state as long as your intuition suggests. Repeat this attempt many times until you are able to enter the *Pineal gland*. Here the union with the Divine takes place. The TAT TVAM ASI state manifests itself. During this supreme stage of union, one is devoid of physical consciousness and unaware of one's surroundings.

After the Omkar sound ceases to exist
the Effulgent Form appears.
Nothing exists except the Sun of the Soul.
I, Shama Churn, am that Sun. (*Lahiri Mahasaya*) ¹

My thoughts on Swami Hariharananda's Kriya vision

This Master is contested on some Forums. In practice it is written that he was not initiated into *Kriya* by *Sri Yukteswar* and that he had no right to direct the *Karar Ashram* where this latter Master had lived.

Having known and talked for a long time with *Swami Hariharananda*, also taking into account that almost every year he made changes to his *Kriya*, I formed an idea of him as an intelligent self-taught person who had learned the various aspects of *Kriya* from various sources including the *Radhasoami* movement and had continuously experimented and realized them with his personal practice.

For these reasons I was very pleased to know him and I will always be grateful to him for having transmitted to me in a very effective way the importance of always seeking the *Omkar* aspect in *Kriya Pranayama*.

The points that I now intend to discuss about his vision of *Kriya Yoga* are mainly three: his particular teaching within the *First Kriya* which is called *Kriya Meditation*, the fact that he had eliminated not only the practice of *Navi Kriya* but also that of *Thokar* and finally the great emphasis that he always gave on the concentration on the *Fontanel* and not on the heart.

[1] *Swami Hariharananda's First Kriya* is wonderful, with the commitment of a few days of applying his *Kriya Pranayama* and of his *Kriya Meditation* technique one can reach a dimension of unspeakable Beauty. Contact with the *Omkar* dimension is therefore within reach even for a beginner.

¹ Lahiri Mahasaya is Shama Churn – Shyama Charan. This sentence is contained in Lahiri Mahasaya's diaries. Many sentences from the diaries are to be found in the book *Purana Purusha* by Dr. Ashok Kumar Chatterjee

[2] Regarding the decision to eliminate *Navi Kriya* and *Thokar*, *Swami Hariharananda* initiated a major deviation from the method of *Lahiri Mahasaya*. One day I heard *Swamiji* criticizing *Thokar* saying that it can produce damage to the cervical vertebrae.

A teacher from his school told me: "*Thokar* is not necessary and can even be disturbing. The repetition of a *Mantra* on a *Chakra* is enough to awaken it. The long process of holding the breath used in some forms of *Thokar* is also very stressful. Instead the repetition of a *Mantra* helps to lift the consciousness towards higher regions. One sits quietly, with eyes closed, observing the center of darkness that lies in front of him and perceives the light within. The breath is natural and flows freely." Before taking leave of me, he emphasized once again that there is no other means of spiritual liberation, except through the *Omkar* experience.

[3] Now let's consider the last point. In *Swami Hariharananda's Kriya* we tend to transcend the spine with its *Chakras* and find refuge in the upper part of the head, i.e. in the *Sahasrara*. In other words we find the tendency to escape from what in *Lahiri's Kriya* is considered a duty: to face the primary need of our being which consists in living more in the heart and less in the brain. In *Swami Hariharananda's Kriya* we do not find that enormous work in the region of the heart foreseen by *Lahiri Mahasaya*.

It is true that in both paths we have clear instructions on how to reach the region located in the highest part of the brain where we can experience the dimension of an unspeakable state of ecstasy. But this experience, if it is not supported by a work on the heart, can become alienation.

Ultimately, I am convinced that to identify the *Sahasrara Chakra*, (*Fontanel*) and the head centers (Pituitary and Pineal glands) as our ultimate goal is to follow a refined illusion.

I believe our true destination is the "Uncreated Light" (so the Hesychasts said) in the region of the heart. The obsession with always keeping the mind in the *Sahasrara* region has produced ego-filled people who have lost touch with the reality of life and become fixated on behaviors and theories that are a caricature of the spiritual path.

I am saddened to say this but it is my duty to be honest. In my life I have made the choice to say a total yes to the thought of *Lahiri Mahasaya*.

Among all the techniques I received from *Swami Hariharananda* I am very grateful for the teaching to aim, during each phase of *Kriya*, to remain internally in tune with the *Omkar* dimension and therefore always try to listen to the inner sound of *Om*. And then I prize his *Fourth Kriya* with which I learned to perceive the *Pineal gland* and to maintain the concentration on this point steadily during my practice of *Kriya Pranayama*.

CHAPTER 15

A VERY SIMPLE FORM OF KRIYA YOGA

Years ago, I heard of a *Kriya* teacher who maintained that many who practice *Kriya Pranayama* make a serious mistake. I contacted him. He was very open with me and clear in his explanations.

He explained to me that we should practice *Kriya Pranayama* in order to enter *Sushumna* with our awareness. But to achieve this feat we must first make the breath extremely subtle – in fact, to enter *Sushumna* one must behave with extreme delicacy!

Well, almost all of the *Kriya* schools teach to raise the energy in the *Sushumna* with force and in a coarse way. They teach to produce with a certain force, from the beginning, a sound in the throat and immediately teach to visualize the energy going up and down the spine. This is not good!

Practicing thus, *Kundalini* does not move upwards but is dispersed in the body and burnt up in it; this creates physical ailments. The reason for such disturbances lies in the fact that initially the *Nadis* are partially blocked. These schools are fully aware of these disturbances (nervous attacks following the practice, sensation that nothing good is produced by this technique) and this is why they recommend practicing for a few months only 12-14 *Kriya* breaths and then increasing this number very gradually.

Instead we should start in a very simple way and without expecting surprising results. Then, as you progress in this way, something deep and meaningful will happen, it will happen naturally, effortlessly.

Ultimately, the correct practice foresees that during *Kriya Pranayama*, the inner gaze remains fixed on the central point of the spiritual eye between the eyebrows (*Kutastha*) and nowhere else! Therefore it should not try to move through the *Chakras* from bottom to top during inhalation and from top to bottom during exhalation. We keep focus only in *Kutastha*. Of course we check that there is no strain on the eyes. Everything must be natural.

As for *Kechari Mudra*, *baby Kechari* is enough for beginners – *Baby Kechari* means holding the tip of the tongue up, touching the soft part of the palate.

Let us now describe *Kriya Pranayama* as this teacher teaches it. I will then report his vision of the *Higher Kriyas*.

Kriya Pranayama technique

By keeping both shoulders in a natural position, expanding the chest a little, bringing the back into a straight position, gently lowering the chin, gazing mentally between the two eyebrows, the position is kept stable without effort. Do not cross your eyes, simply place yourself in the point between the eyebrows as if this were a cave where you take refuge.

Take a deep breath.² Mentally chant *Om* 6 times in *Kutastha* during inhalation and 6 times during exhalation. This is the main practical teaching.

Unlike other forms of *Kriya*, during this initial part do not place *Om* in the physical location of each *Chakra*. In fact, you don't feel the body at all. The breath does not have to take effort – so don't create (for now) any sound in your throat. If your breath is very short, accept this situation without uncomfortably trying to lengthen your breath. A longer breath will spontaneously appear over time. What matters is that you stay focused on *Kutastha* by mentally chanting *Om* 6 + 6 times. In summary, as you inhale and exhale, "knock" on the door of *Kutastha* while mentally chanting these *Oms*.

The recommended number of breaths is 108 and therefore (if you do not fall asleep, if you are not disturbed by external events) you will eventually mentally chant the syllable *Om* $12 \times 108 = 1296$ times in *Kutastha*.

This "knocking" will give you the power to mentally touch the central point of each *Chakra* – this happens spontaneously, so don't try to anticipate this event by means of complicated visualizations. This event happens because the sixth *Chakra Ajna* rules everything: it leads you to align yourself with each *Chakra*.

When you inhale and exhale, if you mentally chant *Om* the prescribed number of times in the central point of *Kutastha*, this subtle action reverberates in each *Chakra* automatically – that is, even if you are not aware of it.

In *Kutastha* there is only one sphere of Light and everything happens there. Your body, your spine, everything is there. As you progress, the exercise becomes more and more enjoyable.

Over time [if it does not happen today, it will happen tomorrow: you have to be patient and encourage the right attitude] you will feel that the spine exists, that it is possible to perceive it in all its length. There is nothing special to do. Do not try to achieve this by shifting the consciousness down. I repeat: everything happens automatically.

In the meantime you will notice that the breathing is slower and the

² In this situation "deep breath" means: "Deep as much as you are able to mentally chant 6 + 6 *Oms*."

mental chanting of the various *Oms* is also calmer and more pleasant. At some point you will feel that the six *Chakras* exist. It is not said that the spinal column with the six *Chakras* appear to the inner vision as they have been described by tradition. There are many ways of perceiving the *Chakras*.

You will also realize that the mental chants of *Om* in *Kutastha* are also happening in the center of each *Chakra*.

At some point you will notice that the breath is accompanied by a soft sound in the throat. It is the sound of the friction of the air in the throat. In this way the breathing slows down and becomes thin. Over time the sound of the exhalation will resemble that produced by a small flute through which very little air passes. But now don't worry about what this should sound like.

If all goes well as expected, if calm is maintained, the breath passes through the *Chakras* from the first to the sixth and from the sixth to the first and in each *Chakra* the syllable *Om* will be vibrated. This is a delightful situation. This usually occurs towards the end of the 108 breaths. The whole being is in a luminous sphere located between the *Kutastha* and the head center. No matter what you see, it matters that you feel perfectly comfortable, engrossed in the beauty of the procedure. As you approach the end of the 108 breaths, you will likely experience light in *Kutastha*. This will be intensified by the *Yoni Mudra*. After *Yoni Mudra* and *Maha Mudra* you will sit down again gathering consciousness in *Kutastha* without doing anything. That is, without chanting *Om* and without paying attention to the breath.

Let us add a "subtlety" that is discovered over time. Keep your chin a few millimeters down and in so that *Kutastha* and *Medulla* are on the same level. Well realize that you exist in the *Medulla* while it is only the visual force that is focused at the point between the eyebrows. Not only that, realize that each manifestation, each luminous revelation of the *Chakras* occurs about four centimeters inwards with respect to the point between the eyebrows: this is the seat of *Ajna*. Maybe this seems complicated but with practicing everything will become clearer.

Questions and answers on the Kriya Pranayama technique

Some *kriyabans* find it difficult to learn this form of *Kriya Pranayama*. Many unexpected questions arise.

I would like to know more about the process of 'knocking' with Om in Kutastha. If we mentally chant Om, then at that moment we no longer have Kutastha in mind.

The point is not: "having *Kutastha* in mind" but being there, within *Kutastha*. The mind is quiet, the thought process is not stressed by the worry "I must have *Kutastha* in mind otherwise my practice is wrong." No. None of this. You are engaged in two activities, [1] breathing [2] repeatedly place *Om* in the central point of *Kutastha*. That is all. If you do this for a few minutes, you will enter a true heavenly state. With patience you will reach a divine state of contemplation.

Some people speculate on the duration of each *Om*. They then ask if there is a small pause after each *Om* and they want to know how many tenths of a second it lasts... I think that in this case it is necessary to leave these people free to be sophists and thus build their own failure with their own strength. *Kriya* may sometimes seem like a chemical recipe but its nature is that of an art based on intuition, intelligence, common sense.

Does it happen that the breaths proceed without any control on our part, as in the Hong So technique?

During the *Hong So* technique we observe the spontaneous process of breathing without caring whether it is long or short. Indeed, during the *Hong So* technique our breath lasts no more than a couple of seconds and, as we go on, the breath tends to disappear. Now, how could "*Hong So* breathing" support the *Kriya Yoga* procedure which gradually leads to a lengthening of the breath and the movement of the accompanying current up and down the spine?

In the teaching of *Lahiri Mahasaya* it is stated that in the long run one becomes capable of practicing a very high form of *Pranayama*: the inhalation and exhalation are lengthened up to 22 + 22 seconds.

Put another way: in this *Kriya Pranayama* we use a NATURAL breath. But this breath has to be slow so that we can then mentally chant *Om* six times while inhaling and six times exhaling. Our way of breathing must therefore be able to sustain this mental action. The breath must go on effortlessly, but it must exist! The breath must be natural but we must cooperate so that it gradually lengthens.

If you have a very short breath and therefore are unable to mentally pronounce all these *Oms*, then chant these *Oms* faster. Your breath will lengthen after a certain number of breaths.

What is the best routine?

108 *Kriya* breaths [time required: 40 to 50 minutes.] After that, *Yoni Mudra* is practiced (only once in 24 hours), 3 *Maha Mudra* and then remain calm, concentrated on *Kutastha*. In this final phase we enjoy the peace and bliss that comes from the practice of *Kriya*.

It is explained that even a beginner should start immediately with the 108 repetitions. There is no lower number to start with, there is no recommended progression. Of course if one is sick, he does not practice at all. And if one, due to circumstances beyond their control, can only practice a smaller number, well this can happen but it doesn't have to become the rule. As for other numbers found in the letters written by *Lahiri* to his disciples, we must understand that those letters represent very personal instructions. Here we are considering general advice given to serious *kriyabans* in good health.

As for *Maha Mudra* there is a variation recommended for those who find *Maha Mudra* too difficult. "Lie flat on your back. Breathe in. Raise your legs while keeping your pelvis on the floor. Join your hands under your knees. Keep your balance on the lower pelvis bones and keep your forehead near your knees. Exhale. Return to the starting position."

There is an alternative practice to conclude the practice of *Kriya Pranayama*. When the breath is internalized in *Sushumna*, keep the attention in *Kutastha*. With a natural breath inhale in *Sushumna* with a single *Om* mental chant and exhale with another *Om*. Practice in this way until you forget about yourself and reach the stage of *Samadhi*.

How do I know when the correct time has come to make the sounds in the throat?

It is typical of *Kriya* schools to teach you how to make loud sounds in the throat from the very beginning of the practice. They explain that loud sounds in the beginning are fine because they produce cool, warm sensations in the spine. These sensations are produced by *Ida* and *Pingala*. These currents have nothing to do with being in *Sushumna*. If you insist too much on these sounds from the very beginning of *Pranayama*, you could cause problems and lose the magic of the practice.

Let the sounds in the throat come later. They will be more enjoyable, they will capture your concentration and help the procedure. They will appear spontaneously when the breath is long enough. Only the intuition born of meditation can help you understand when it is good for you to try to increase the strength of your breath and then produce the sounds.

Why is it said: "After entering Sushumna you will have to use strength in Pranayama."

This is a reference to the *Second level* of *Kriya*. It may happen that before completing the 108 *Kriya* breaths you are in *Sushumna*. It may happen that at a certain moment you feel that the veil of darkness has disappeared and you see the splendor of the Divine Light in the center of which is the point of entry of the *Sushumna*. In this wonderful situation you will be able to perceive the color of each *Chakra*.

This is the realm of *Second Kriya*. Well, if you find yourself in this situation it is not necessary that you comply with the injunction not to exceed the prescribed number 108. In this case you can go on until you enter the ecstatic state and there you will lose yourself in divine contemplation. *Lahiri Mahasaya* said that once this state is achieved, there is no other education to be practiced.

SOME NOTES ABOUT THE HIGHER KRIYAS

According to this school, the *Kriya* path has 4 levels. There is no *higher Kriya* that is presented as something inherently different that requires tortuous explanations.

The *Second Kriya* is not another technique to be added to the previous ones but it is the result of the profound practice of the *First Kriya*. The higher levels of *Kriya* are all potentially contained in the *Kriya Pranayama* you have learned: they are the full revelation of *Kriya Pranayama*. They arise from a good execution of it.

This school states: "Since you are a beginner you cannot immediately perceive *Kriya Pranayama* in all its majesty. Do not think that there are mysteries that are voluntarily kept hidden from you. So if you seriously practice the instructions given to you, you will be guided in an infallible way to discover the deeper aspects of *Kriya Pranayama*. You will be guided by the initiator or by another *kriyaban* or by your own intuition." The revelation of how to move through the higher steps will occur spontaneously before the inner vision.

First Kriya begins with normal breathing and then develops into a subtle form of breath which is pure *Prana*. In *Second Kriya* you employ an extremely subtle breath which is the life force itself. This subtle life force is Mind. The subtle form of the Mind will be used during the *Third Kriya*.

Finally when the Soul immerses with eternal Absolute awareness, then the elevated state of contemplation will be revealed. In the *Fourth Kriya* you will be absorbed in the pure perception of the Divine Sound and Light and you will immerse yourself in the universal Spirit.

Second Kriya

To approach the dimension of *Second Kriya*, the practice of *First Kriya* must settle exactly in 108 *Kriya Pranayama* twice a day. For those who cannot find time for two sessions, a daily routine of one session is an absolute requirement.

After practicing *First Kriya* for a long time, when the breath is subtle and the mind gets stability in *Ajna Chakra*, this is the time when you have to apply a force in *Pranayama* to enter *Sushumna*. Those who have entered the *Sushumna* will clearly understand the following explanation but for those who have not entered the *Sushumna*, it will serve for future reference.

In *First Kriya*, applying force is wrong and harmful: the *Nadis* would remain blocked. Your first goal in *Pranayama* is to make the breath subtle. In the *Second Kriya* you work with this subtle breath to pierce the *Chakras* one after the other. Only when you are able to bring the subtle *Prana* into each of the six *Chakras* of the spine, then you have entered the *Second Level of Kriya*.

In this *Second Kriya* you are able to feel the energy moving through the pure power of the will and piercing each *Chakra*.

In other words, consider this technique a completion of the previous one. If you manage to carry out the instructions that you will find here, you will be able to fully experience all the majesty of *Kriya Pranayama* which, as a beginner, you were not allowed to understand.

Practical instructions

Resume the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* but with an almost non-existent breath. The meaning of 'almost non-existent breath' is understood only with practice.

"Inhalation" now means this: breath and *Prana* approach *Muladhara* and slowly rise through the spine. You feel the energy in *Muladhara* and slowly guide it towards the second *Chakra*. This happens thanks to the power of the will acting on the subtle breathing process.

When you are in the second *Chakra*, you don't care whether you are breathing or not. There may be a short in-between breath, but you only focus on energy. You proceed by guiding the energy through the *Chakras*. In this way of proceeding you draw the first *Chakra* up into the second, then the second up into the third and so on With a great sense of joy, you will feel that the force of *Prana* opens the knots and pierces each *Chakra*. Arrived at the sixth *Chakra* you will experience the state of calm *Prana* in the upper part of the head, from here the energy will descend very easily, almost spontaneously, returning to the base *Chakra*.

A complete turn (up and down) through the *Chakras* takes one minute or a few more seconds. In the beginning, it may take longer to

complete a full circle. But after a few months a *Second Kriya* round will last one minute. This is the best way to practice 12 rounds.

Other considerations

Second Kriya is, by definition, the *Kriya* of strength. This *Pranayama* is called *Kathor Pranayama*. You apply a certain degree of pressure on the *Prana*. You have to bring *Prana* and breath up through the mental force. The pressure you need will come without difficulty.

The nature of the *Chakras* will begin to reveal itself. The particular energy of each of them begins to awaken. In *Kutastha* the light of the *Chakras* begins to appear. They appear as spheres of light in the region between *Kutastha* and *Ajna*.

It is explained that the area from *Muladhara* to *Manipura* is very restless. Therefore you have to apply a lot of force on *Pranayama* to go through this stage. You practice in this intense way up to the third *Chakra*. After passing through the *Manipura Chakra*, a state of calm begins in the mind, thus the force on the *Prana* is no longer required. Mind and *Prana* will automatically begin to move upwards due to a force of attraction exerted by the sixth *Chakra*. You will perceive a constant Divine white Light. Calm will increase strongly as your mind moves towards the sixth *Chakra*.

Let's talk about an important point. During a profound practice of the *Second Kriya* you will have the intuition to stop at each *Chakra* for a longer time in order to absorb its meaning and get in tune with its *Tattwa*. [The *Tattwas* are the five elements: earth, water, fire, air and ether.]

The path from *Muladhara* to *Ajna* is the road where the various aspects of divinity are revealed. You will experience the various realities (*tattwas*) that control each *Chakra*. What a *kriyaban* seeks is the "realization" of the meaning of each *Tattwa*. Each *Tattwa* will give you a particular blessing or "power." This means that you can develop a particular power or *Siddhi*.

These *Tattwas* exert a great force of attraction. You must overcome any temptation to develop powers. You must answer "No" to each *Tattwa* and ask only for blessings. The mind that has completely renounced associating with the five *Chakras* establishes itself in a state of perfect concentration by abiding in its natural state. The force of attraction downwards has no more power and the *Prana* collects at the point between the eyebrows. By means of discipline, the breath that enters the body and that which comes out are moved from the *Muladhara Chakra* in successive steps towards *Ajna*. The door of *Kutastha* becomes visible. When this happens, one is ready for the *Third Kriya*.

Note on the practice of Thokar during the Second Kriya

This school knows the discipline of *Thokar* (psycho-physical method to open the knot of the heart) but does not consider it essential. There are many variations of *Thokar* taught by different schools but all require physical movement.

In the *Kriya* tradition of this school we are taught instead that in order to open a knot (not just the knot of the heart), there is no need for physical movements. The knots are bundles of *Nadis* that are untied by the *Second Kriya* process as we have just described it. The breath becomes like an arrow that unties the knots and pierces the center of each *Chakra* in the *Sushumna* making the *Thokar* procedure unnecessary.

This school provides us *kriyabans* with a particularly high teaching. In essence, it says: after practicing *Kriya Pranayama* in a good way, you have the freedom to choose how to proceed. For example, you can practice *Thokar* and see what effects it has on you.

You can proceed with the *Second Kriya* as we now explain and see if it works. At the end of this you could try *Thokar* again and see if only now will it reveal all the power that *Lahiri Mahasaya* promised, which is to finally open the door of *Sushumna*. The same goes for the *Third* and *Fourth Kriya* that we introduced in chapter 8. In conclusion, it is up to you to decide when and if to practice these procedures.

Third Kriya

While the *First* and *Second Kriya* are practiced below *Kutastha*, the *Third Kriya* is practiced in *Kutastha*. Above the *Manipura*, the mind becomes attracted to a persuasive light perceived in *Kutastha*. The eyes and the mind are fixed in *Kutastha* with a hypnotic attraction. Right now one has only one task of doing: "Knocking" on the door of *Kutastha*.

The *Third Kriya* consists of a deep concentration in *Kutastha* accompanied by an intense *Japa* of *Om* at that point.

In the letters of *Lahiri Mahasaya* we find a reference to this *Japa*: "*Japa 432*." In fact, the number of *Oms* is revealed to you when you reach this stage. You will be able to mentally chant this number of *Oms* during "one single breath." What this means will be revealed to you by your divinely guided intuition.

Very gradually you will learn to hold your breath, as on that occasion you will have full control of the *Prana*.

During this practice you will apply *Shambhavi Mudra*: the mind and the inner vision are firmly fixed in *Kutastha*, in its center which is called *Bindu*. At the appropriate time you will see a tunnel. Here you will exert a continuous push. The breath required for this third level is more subtle than

that for the second level. In order to realize the third level, a transformation must have occurred in the body.

The entrance to this tunnel is a deep black and is surrounded by a Divine Light which is guarded by two types of power: the first veil blocks the ability to see the Divine Light, the second veil is a diverting force that causes let the mind slip out of the tunnel entrance. When the mind and the inner vision become fixed in the center of this Light, one enters the tunnel. The entrance to it will expand and the inner world will become a thousand times brighter.

In the center of *Kutastha* there is a roundness called *Chittakash*. This area is as clear as a mirror as it reflects everything. By applying a subtle life force (*Prana*) very intensely the veil decreases and this area is seen very clearly. Then you will see a reflection that is shaped like an egg, which is a brilliant black, surrounded by a brilliant light. It also appears as an eye. There are billions of universes within this universe. With the help of *Shambhavi Mudra* you will pierce this universe. One day, by divine grace the *Kutastha* will be pierced and you will sink into the "lake of *Bindu*". All perceptions will then cease and the "moment of moments" of your life will occur: the entry into the *Sahasrara*. In this way, by destroying all the veils, you will obtain the salvation with which you will avoid the pain of death. At that moment, neither the pain of death nor any connection with the world can touch you.

Fourth Kriya

As soon as the *Kriya* of *Prana* ends, the action-less meditation of *Sahasrara* begins. In this state you will find yourself beyond the *Chakras*, beyond the mind. In *Sahasrara* you will not need to work on *Prana*. You will only have to immerse yourself in the *Omkar* Light and Sound. Here begins the *Kriya* of meditation; the sage Patanjali calls it *Dharana*, *Dhyana* and *Samadhi*. If you only consider the definition that the sage Patanjali gives of those states, you will not be able to understand how high this state is. Indeed, in this school we are not referring to a purely mental procedure.

Eventually, with more and more practice, body consciousness will end and the state of divine intoxication will manifest. Meditation will take place in the center of the *Sahasrara Chakra*. This is the beginning of the *Fourth Kriya*. In this last stage, no *Mantra* is chanted mentally.

In the previous *Kriyas*, the "observer " is in *Medulla*, while the focus of attention was in *Kutastha*. In this *Fourth Kriya* the position is reversed. The "observer" is in *Kutastha*, and the focus of attention is in the back of the head. For this reason it is said that while the previous *Kriyas* are the *Kriyas* of the East, this *Kriya* is a *Kriya* of the West.

In the center of the *Sahasrara Chakra* you will find a star which is called "*Sri Bindu*" which is also the center point of an equilateral triangle. It

has three *Chakras*, three stars at the three corners of the triangle. You will have to pierce these stars and then you will have to focus on the *Mula Chakra*. By piercing the *Mula Chakra*, you will cross the borderline of death and attain salvation.

This is a very profound Meditation: you will begin to obtain the supreme knowledge. At this point you will forget your identity and immerse yourself in total bliss. At this level, mind and intellect are lost and the individual soul is immersed in the universal Soul.

Final remark

Here ends the explanation given by this school to the whole practice of *Kriya Yoga*. I personally find this explanation very, very profound and of great inspiration to practice *Kriya* with ever greater subtlety and depth.

His *First Kriya*, as the reader will have seen, is very easy to perform even if it is demanding as it requires a practice of 108 breaths. Some readers may be puzzled by the fact that this school requires totally ignoring the physical location where the *Chakras* are located. It is possible to overcome this perplexity by thinking that this task will be completed with the execution of the *Second Kriya*. The *First Kriya* serves to give the breath such a subtlety that could not be obtained by starting immediately with the attempt to perceive the physical place where the *Chakras* are located.

According to this school, teaching a beginner to immediately perceive the energy penetrating each *Chakra* is a serious mistake which, almost always, makes progress in the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* impossible.

In other words, if a reader who has been practicing *Kriya Pranayama* for a long time in the classic way that we explained in chapter 6, should not be satisfied with his own practice, let him take into consideration the possibility of restarting his practice by reconsidering the correct starting point, i.e. the practice of *First Kriya* as this school teaches .

CHAPTER 16

HOW I CONCEIVE MY KRIYA ROUTINE

This chapter is for those who have followed me up to this point. Here I share my experience on what has proved particularly useful for obtaining concrete results in the practice of *Kriya Yoga*.

To create my routine I started from the following consideration: *Lahiri Mahasaya* taught us to focus for a long time on *Kriya Pranayama*, preparing this practice with *Maha Mudra* and completing it with *Navi Kriya* and *Yoni Mudra*. He has stated several times that the fullness of the spiritual path can be achieved with just the practice of these few procedures. This means that the 4 knots can all be untied by limiting ourselves to this practice. To help us hasten this process he introduced *Thokar* or the technique that unties the knot of the heart and opens the door of the *Sushumna*.

Let's try to reflect on this statement of his:

"The breath is normally oriented externally. If, through the practice of *Pranayama*, it is internally oriented, then it is possible, through the technique of *Thokar*, to open the door to the inner temple. With a strong action on the *Anahata Chakra* the door opens. Deep absorption occurs and this state becomes stable for a prolonged period."

This sentence is the synthesis of *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya* with its different phases. After achieving perfection in *Pranayama* it is possible to obtain the fruit of *Thokar*. Through it the door opens.

Opening this door implies entering it and this happens only after making the breath extremely subtle and then using every possible means to travel the *Sushumna* channel.

I therefore decided to divide the routine into five moments, a preparation part followed by four actual parts:

Preparation for the Kriya routine

Here I deal with how to calm the mind and then better prepare the physical and energetic conditions of my spine.

[I] Kriya Pranayama – simple form

Here I practice a part of *Kriya Pranayama* as described in the first two phases of chapter 6. I explain why I find it helpful to add *Aswini Mudra* or the three classic *Bandhas*.

[II] Thokar

I apply *Thokar* to create and maintain as long as possible a feeling of warmth combined with an ecstatic perception in the heart region.

[III] Kriya Pranayama – Advanced form

Here I resume the practice of *Kriya Pranayama*, which I had interrupted to practice *Thokar*. I try to practice a *Pranayama* that is as high as possible trying to lift consciousness to the crown of the head and get closer to the state of "calm breath".

[IV] Full realization of Kriya Yoga

I apply the procedures that I have found most useful for entering the subtle spinal channel of *Sushumna*, reaching the spiritual light in the region of the heart and *Kutastha*.

I invite you to consider the various moments of the following *Kriya* routine and see if they can inspire you to create your own routine. A complete routine like the one I am describing does not take more than 60/80 minutes.

PREPARATION FOR THE KRIYA ROUTINE

In my opinion it is very important to begin the routine by calming the mind with the practice of *Japa*. It is the incessant practice of a *Mantra* until every thought is annihilated which causes the disappearance of the breath. During each practice there must be the continuous and insistent action of a *Mantra*. We talked about this extensively in chapter 11. It is necessary to retrieve this practice with the right devotional spirit. I have chosen a *Mantra* of 8 syllables (see chap. 3) I feel comfortable with it and I use it in a low voice 108 times before starting my *Kriya* routine. I sometimes use the same *Mantra*, but only practice it mentally, in the final part of my routine. In conclusion, my preparation consists of this: 108 *Mantras* in a whisper, then I practice *Swami Hariharananda's Bends* followed by *Maha Mudra*.

[I] KRIYA PRANAYAMA – SIMPLE FORM

The goal I keep in mind at this stage is to become aware of the spine. I have found that a great help occurs by continuously practicing *Aswini Mudra*.

The standard definition of *Aswini Mudra* is: repeatedly contract the muscles at the base of the spine (anal sphincter) at a rate of approximately two contractions per second. When you learn this technique, you also tend to contract the buttocks, the perineum or even the entire pelvic region; over time, one learns to contract only the sphincter muscles. *Aswini Mudra* is different from *Mula Bandha*. In *Mula Bandha* we have a long contraction followed by an appreciable relaxation and not a series of rapid contraction-relaxation as in *Aswini Mudra*. I practice *Aswini Mudra* continuously

during *Kriya Pranayama*.

During the first 12 *Kriya* breaths the *Aswini Mudra* is strong; then I decrease its intensity so that it becomes like a slight "internal contraction of the lower part of the spine" – it is clear that the spine cannot be contracted: this is only a sensation.

While this procedure may seem irritating and disturbing, I assure you that you get used to it easily and the results are very noticeable. It is therefore essential to be adamant and to continue with it.

I maintain this succession of slight contractions of the anal sphincter throughout the practice of *Pranayama*. There is little physical movement, just enough to create a habit. At some point I have the certainty that something positive is happening. The perception of the spine becomes tangible, I begin to perceive the entirety of the *Sushumna* as something bright, like a silvery thread. When this feeling begins to manifest, the practice of *Pranayama* seems to have a life of its own. An ecstatic radiance pervades the whole being. A nice feeling of fresh air rising through the *Chakras* makes me feel full of energy. A gentle warmth that descends permeating every part of the body from top to bottom instills a great feeling of comfort.

During the day following this practice, a widespread joy permeates my activities and even the simplest moment of contemplation of the beauty of nature fills me with joy. I have realized that the effect of this *Mudra* is absolutely precious.

As an alternative I use the three *Bandhas* (*Jalandhara*, *Mula* and *Uddiyana*) after each inhalation and after each exhalation. This happens because after months of *Aswini Mudra* one can get tired and this practice seems to no longer produce its particular effects, while the three *Bandhas* always give the sensation that each *Kriya Pranayama* is "complete." I devote at least three seconds to each application of the three *Bandhas* but I have also experienced a longer time, always with excellent results.

To conclude, I specify that in this phase I only practice half of the number of *Kriya Pranayama* that I have decided to practice: the other half will take place in a higher form as I will explain in part [III].

[III] THOKAR

For a long time I have used *Thokar* as explained in the *Third Kriya* of chapter 8 precisely where I illustrate the first way of conceiving how to hold the breath.

Now I find the practice of the second way extremely effective by following the instructions given in the paragraph: "*Some reflections on the difficulty of increasing the repetitions of the head movements while*

maintaining perfect Kumbhaka". This practice creates a feeling of warmth mixed with ecstatic inebriation.

Having practiced the preliminary *Amantrak* and *Samantrak* techniques explained in chapter 9, I sometimes practice the *Thokar Tribhangamurari*.

[III] KRIYA PRANAYAMA – ADVANCED FORM

In this phase I propose to use the transformation that *Thokar* has just produced in my psycho-physical system to complete the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* in the highest possible form. This means first of all centering the consciousness totally in the light of the *Sahasrara*.

In addition, the sounds in the throat become increasingly subtle or disappear altogether. All this leads to a great deepening. Furthermore the *Kriya* breaths are slower. I try to get to half a minute per breath or even the ideal time of 44 seconds per breath. I know this is difficult but I try to do my best.

[IV] FULL REALIZATION OF KRIYA YOGA

The purpose of this last stage is to reach the breathless state and experience the spiritual light in the heart region and *Kutastha*. This is the most subtle practice exposed throughout the book, so I am going to describe it with great care.

First part: stimulate the perception of the Chakras

This is a very pleasant practice that only takes a couple of minutes. It serves to create a great calm.

Leave the *Kechari Mudra* during this practice. Take a deep inhalation of about 4 seconds through the nose. Through it, draw energy (*Kundalini*) from the body and guide it towards the first *Chakra*. Exhale rapidly through the open mouth "huh" ³ – this intensifies the perception of energy. The length of the exhalation is about half a second.

Then take a deep inhalation – the length is about 3-4 seconds. Feel the energy rising from the first *Chakra* to the second. Quickly exhale with mouth open "huh" perceiving the intensification of energy. The length of the exhalation is about half a second.

Repeat the procedure guiding *Kundalini* from the base of the spine into the third *Chakra*. [It is not necessary to perceive *Kundalini* distinctly crossing the second *Chakra*.]

The procedure is repeated by guiding *Kundalini* from the base of the spine to the fourth *Chakra*. [It is not necessary to perceive *Kundalini* distinctly crossing the second and third *Chakras*.]

³ The sound is the same you produce with your mouth when you want to fog up a glass.

The procedure is repeated by guiding *Kundalini* from the base of the spine to the fifth *Chakra*. [It is not needed ...]

The procedure is repeated by guiding *Kundalini* from the base of the spine to the *Medulla*. [It is not needed ...]

Take a quick inhalation through your nose. The length is approximately 1 second. Simply feel that *Kundalini* is present in the seventh *Chakra*. Take a subtle exhalation – the length is about 4 seconds. [This exhalation occurs through the nose.] Feel the *Kundalini* energy descend from the seventh *Chakra* to the spiritual eye, in the space between the eyebrows.

Take another quick inhalation through the nose – as in the previous breath. Feel that *Kundalini* is present in the seventh *Chakra*. Now, with another exhalation (the length is about 4 seconds) feel that the *Kundalini* energy descends from the seventh *Chakra* to the front of the fifth *Chakra*: the Adam's apple.

The procedure is repeated by guiding *Kundalini* from the seventh *Chakra* to the front of the fourth *Chakra* – the central part of the sternum. Then it is repeated guiding – from the seventh *Chakra* to the front of the third *Chakra* – the navel. Then from the seventh *Chakra* to the front of the second *Chakra* – the lower abdomen. Then from the seventh *Chakra* to the base of the spine – or the seat of *Muladhara*.

This completes the first round. There are two more rounds. The second round is subtler than the first and the third even subtler. The action on each *Chakra* must become increasingly sweet and internalized. All of this is enough to create a wonderful state of consciousness.

Second part: Kriya in loops

This procedure has the fantastic power to lead a person to a state where the breath disappears or becomes so subtle as to be practically imperceptible.

It based on using the power contained in the *Muladhara* by shifting the attention several times from the *Muladhara* to various *Chakras* above it. It was explained that the *Muladhara Chakra* is like a cup which contains the *Kutastha*! Well here we try to make full use of the power of *Muladhara* until we are able to move within the spinal passage and therefore to meet the spiritual reality.

I practice this procedure by continually refining it. From now on until the end of the routine I practice my *Mantra* incessantly – only mentally of course. It helps me maintain focus on the spinal substance and touch the essence of each *Chakra*.

Description of my practice

A part of my consciousness perceives the *Muladhara*. Once this is done, I move part of my awareness into the second *Chakra*. While this is happening there is a natural, unforced, inhalation of moderate length (3-4 seconds). After having paused bringing attention to this second *Chakra*, I return to *Muladhara* where I stop for a moment. While this is happening there is a natural, unforced, exhalation of a length equal to that used in the ascent.

What does it mean to "perceive a *Chakra*?" It means feeling it as a real presence in one's consciousness and this, in my experience, occurs by perceiving in each *Chakra* (both the *Muladhara* and any *Chakra* above it) a *Tribhangamurari* micro movement (see chapter 9). I have experienced that those who have not yet learned what this micro movement is can simply intuitively induce a short counterclockwise movement in each center.

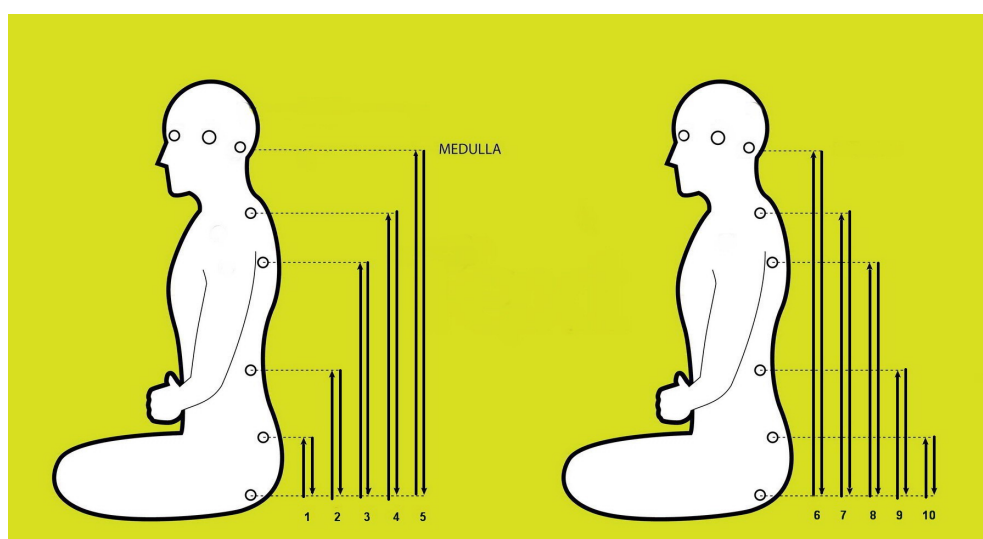


Figure 19. Kriya in loops

Now I create an analogous link between *Muladhara* and the third *Chakra*, therefore I do with the third *Chakra* exactly what I did with the second *Chakra*. Of course, this connection is also accompanied by a subtle breath.

Then I similarly connect the *Muladhara* with the fourth *Chakra*, then with the fifth and also with the *Medulla* center. Then I repeat the connection between *Muladhara* and *Medulla*, then *Muladhara* and fifth, then fourth, third, and second *Chakra*. This is one cycle. I practice two cycles in the way described.

The power of this procedure is manifested by facing two more cycles of it but trying to make the breath even more subtle and, at the same time,

increasing the perception of the various *Chakras* as they are involved.⁴

These two further cycles produce the highest effects. These quiet and gentle shifts of consciousness that alternate between *Muladhara* and the other *Chakras* are a real spiritual experience. A weak perception of the light of these *Chakras* occurs naturally.

The mental chanting of my *Mantra* keeps the attention constantly on the practice and becomes the ability to feel myself inside the spinal substance. Sometimes I realize that I am not able to practice the *Mantra* as I was used to doing until now: the sound of the *Mantra* seems shorter to me and takes on a pounding rhythm.

After completing these two more cycles I feel that the *Chakras* have become like points of pure energy and the spine has become an immobile substance.

Note 1

During this practice you can sometimes "get lost" in some thoughts. It rarely happens, but it happens. This procedure brings the conscience very much inside, in a condition which "comes near" the state of sleep. One can get lost in some reverie, returning after a few minutes to the practice that was interrupted. Almost always, as soon as you regain control of the situation, you can safely resume your practice. Of course, one should never forcibly hold the breath.

Note 2

I warn those who have recently learned *Kriya* that before reaching perfect breathlessness it is necessary to have practiced *Kriya Pranayama* at least for 2-3 years daily. In any case, I also invite those who begin the practice of *Kriya* to face these last procedures (third and fourth part of the routine) in order to get closer to the state of calm breath often spoken of in *Kriya*.

At this point, after having completed a total of four cycles of the "*Kriya in loops*" technique, if the breath has disappeared completely, I concentrate for a long time in the heart center and in *Kutastha*. I apply the following procedure when the breath has not completely disappeared.

Third part: Gathering the breath in the navel region

In the later stages of the spiritual path, the navel center becomes increasingly important. In some *Kriya Yoga* books you find expressions like: "The state of *Samadhi* is born in the navel."

It is explained that by concentrating on the *Samana* current which is in the belt region, the consciousness will be drawn into the *Sushumna* channel and lifted up to the heart center and *Kutastha*.

⁴ I must say that I have never found it useful to complicate the described procedure by contracting the muscles close to the *Chakras*

As we explained in chapter 12, the *Hesychasts* with their heads bowed and their eyes directed towards the abdomen, center their attention on the navel trying to locate the "*place of the heart*." Intuition led me to try too crossing the navel door as if it were the only possible way to get to the "*place of the heart*". In fact, focusing on the navel by intensifying devotion in one's heart is what is recommended by the saints.

Well, the way to achieve this could have been *Navi Kriya* but after various experiments I found the practice I am now describing more effective.

Without looking for absolute precision, which cannot exist, let's simply say that to concentrate on the "*navel region*" it is enough to perceive the physical location of the navel then come back a little and then descend slightly lower inside the abdomen. This is enough to get you started.

I try not to alter the state of "*calm breath*" that I obtained with the previous technique. A short, subtle inhalation guides me into the *navel region*. Here is a pause, quite long but always comfortable. Then a subtle exhalation guides the consciousness to the region of the heart.

This is repeated a few times until a particular experience occurs which is difficult for me to describe: an unlimited sweetness appears and the breath is forgotten. I think this means that consciousness has entered the *Sushumna*.

Sometimes I have the impression of perceiving *Kutastha* but not as a point but as a golden ring which surrounds the whole body. This realization completely calms the thought realm and gives me a contact with the *spiritual reality*.

Conclusion

Entering this state of perfect tranquility is a perception that cannot be explained in words. When the breath disappears altogether, this is like a miracle:

" No me pidàis que lo explique. Tengo el fuego en las manos " ⁵
(*Garcia Lorca*)

Here I would like to reassure the reader that if he practices respecting the principles described in this chapter, his own *Kriya* will become a free flight towards a state of bliss.

Of course, the reader will have to find out for himself which technical details are best suited to his practice. At the beginning of the path

⁵ "Don't ask me that I explain this. I have the fire in my hands."

it is good to place a certain degree of trust in a school or a teacher, but later it is good to trust only one's own experiences.

I have a lot of respect for those who are self-taught because that has been my path. I am aware that my statement is in contrast with what is usually stated, however I remain firmly convinced that by proceeding in this way it is possible for a person to complete the entire spiritual journey.

Most likely, there will be some kind of 'distance' between you and that Beauty that you will intuitively recognize to be the Divine itself. Your reaction will be an unlimited sense of nostalgia, an inner cry of emotion.

"My worship is of a very strange kind. Holy water is not required. No special utensils are necessary. Even flowers are redundant. In this worship, all gods have disappeared, and emptiness has merged with euphoria." (*Lahiri Mahasaya*)

CHAPTER 17

THE KRIYA OF THE CELLS

In the first part of this book, I explained the great influence that my encounter with the writings of *Mère* and *Satprem* had on me. *Mère* was a disciple of *Sri Aurobindo* and, after his death in 1951, she continued her research.

Well what she calls the "*Kriya of the cells*" and the study of *Taoist Internal Alchemy* ⁶ provided me with an interesting theme to reflect on.

In *Internal Alchemy* we consider three main energies present in the human body: *Jing* (sexual energy, *Qi* (energy of love) and *Shen* (spiritual energy.) Through the practice of the *Microcosmic Orbit*, the sexual energy is transformed, with the help of the breath, in pure love and this in turn in spiritual realization. Once this practice has been mastered, a spontaneous phenomenon of energetic circulation takes place in the body. This circulation is called the *Macrocosmic Orbit* and represents the final goal of the *Inner Alchemy*. It is described like a great infusion of energy that descends like a golden liquid inside the body, in all its cells.

I thought that this infusion of energy might be the experience *Lahiri Mahasaya* had alluded to when, a couple of years after his *Himalayan* initiation, he wrote in his journals: "Following an excellent *Pranayama*, the breath is wholly internal oriented. After a long time, today the purpose of my descent (on earth) has been fulfilled!" When I read this sentence I was deeply impressed. I understood that something quite exceptional had taken place in the spiritual experience of *Lahiri Mahasaya*.

Perhaps he was referring to *Uttam Pranayama* or the *Excellent Pranayama* which he had mentioned elsewhere? But no, that, even if extremely subtle, still remained a movement of energy, of consciousness that takes place in the spine. Perhaps his sentence referred to a breath that is "wholly internal oriented" that is it enters the body: in its cells, perhaps it becomes a substance perceived not only in the lungs but in the whole body? This I don't know.

However, here I try to report the attempts I put into practice to understand the nature of this experience. It was an experience that involved me for several weeks, even months, and was repeated in the following years. It generated in my introspection some important reflections that I report after the description of the experience itself.

⁶ I briefly described this mystical path in chap.2

I must clarify a particular circumstance: the practice I describe took place mainly meditating outdoors with my eyes open and with the firm will to become one with each of the elements of the landscape that was in front of me. Strangely, I can't explain why, I didn't find the practice of *Kechari Mudra* of any use. Perhaps this practice would isolate me from my surroundings, whereas I then wanted to feel one with it. The description of what was my experience is divided into three moments.

[1] Exhalation: descent towards the cells of the body

What I had learned about the role of the navel during *Kriya Pranayama* was intensified more than usual. During the inhalation I expanded the abdomen pushing out the navel; during the exhalation I concentrated intensely on the navel, as it moved towards the spine, and focused my attention on the increase of energy in the abdominal region.

Not only that: before starting each exhalation I created the intention to discover (or open) an inner path to reach the cells of the body. The exhalation thus became a process of descent towards the cells of the body. My breath was meant to be a means to infuse the Divine into my body.

There was a strong pressure of awareness on the whole body. The smallest particle of vitality in the air was not to come out of the nose; all vitality had to be directed into the body. I felt the downward flow of energy as if innumerable hypodermic needles were injecting energy and light into the cells.

I was inspired to think that the sound of the exhalation was like "the cry that breaks the hardest rock" – thus Sri Aurobindo hinted at the power of the *Bija Mantra*, the "sacred sound of the Rishis" – revealing:

... the treasure of heaven
hidden in the secret cave
like the baby of the bird,
inside the infinite rock
(*Rig-Veda*, I.130.3)

[2] Lengthen the exhalation

At a certain point I began to make the exhalation longer than the inhalation. As I proceeded I had the impression that the exhalation could be *lengthened indefinitely*.

A mental pressure directed towards the *Dantian* region was created and increased through concentration and the power of the will. At one point I felt a subtle joy – the pleasant sensation became orgasmic.

Sometimes I found myself with my chin slightly lowered, directed towards the navel as if this were a magnet. The body reminded me of the

need to inhale, stopping the progressive increase of this joy. At this point, a few breaths separated me from the state where all effort ceases.

Remark

Sometimes I experimented with fragmented exhalation.

I divided my exhalation into about 20-30 fragments or even more. With my mouth half closed during the exhalation I produced the sound of s-s-s-s-s-s ... creating a feeling of warmth between the lips. I was constantly transferring this heat to my spine. When I felt the need, I inhaled feeling the energy rising from the *Muladhara* in the spine. I repeated this process a few times.

This form of exhalation possessed a particular radiance of joy! The diaphragm with micro thrusts favored an increase of energy in the cells of the body. I proceeded until the fragments of the breath seemed to have completely dissolved! I felt that I could push the energy wherever I wanted.

[3] Crossing the Breath Barrier

At one point I tried to make the whole process go on only through willpower.

I thought: what is the point, after *Kriya Pranayama*, of doing an intrinsically different technique? So I resolved not to brutally end what I had started with the breath. I thought of carrying forward, using only the force of visualization, for ten to twenty minutes, the intention that had been pursued during the practice with the breath. So I tried to completely forget the breath by continuing to visualize with my mind an energetic current that went up in the brain together with the sexual energy, transformed and then went down, with the *Shee* sound, in the body until it reached the skin cells.

I tried to make the *Shee* sound stronger and enter the cells like a hypodermic needle. Sometimes I also perceived a force that seemed to come from the navel – almost an inner *Navi Kriya* – that cooperated with this process.

I therefore experienced that it was actually possible to perceive a circulation of energy by forgetting the breath. The ascent of energy was a very short act. So short that it was almost not noticeable. I was under the impression that there was only the descent. This descent was like breathing into all atoms. Instead of the normal exhalation, a refined substance descended from the *Sahasrara* along the spine and spread through the *Chakras* in the body reaching the cells. I thought of the teachings of *Mère [The Mother, Mirra Alfassa]* that is the value of descending into the body through various layers of consciousness trying to contact the *Consciousness of the Cells*. The old way of introducing air into the lungs had been replaced by a new process where breath and energy entered through the pores of the skin.

The great barrier of breath had been crossed: breath as a physical fact was overcome, there was no air coming out of the nose. This was what I perceived. There was an inner source of fresh energy that filled me with physical and mental strength.

The sensation was like that, being in the open air, of feeling the fresh air on the body. It wasn't just a state of well-being: it was like being in a crystalline state of stillness feeling a sense of unlimited security.

I opened my eyes and considered everything in front of and around me as my body. Sometimes I perceived the continuous sound of *Om*. All this process made me know a different energy from the one I was used to perceive during my *Kriya Pranayama*. It did not flow from one point to another. It was a *static* energy.

First effects that immediately follow the practice

This practice had a definite and immediate effect on my mood. To put it briefly, the following days, even when I could not go outdoors because the weather had deteriorated, were lived in the mood of a clear spring day. The simple fact of adding awareness to the exhalation phase of each *Kriya* breath, visualizing that it descends towards each cell of the body had surprising effects. The beauty of living, like a precious wine from a full cup, seemed to overflow from every atom and filled my heart. I felt it as if for years I had hoped in vain that the Divine would become a part of your life, without ever having seen any results ... and suddenly I had discovered that the Divine had always been there.

Heaven's fire is lit in the breast of the earth
and the undying suns here burn.

(*Sri Aurobindo, "A God's labor"*)

The sense of beauty and satisfaction was great, as if an impressionist painter had finally managed to make his visionary conception current, conveying the idea that the inert substance of the matter he portrays is composed of multicolored particles of light, like countless suns that radiate in brilliant transparency.

This process seemed to destroy any mental prison created by myself. Any problems that arose in my mind, especially those connected with intricate and conflicting projects for the future, appeared as an illusion from which I had definitively emerged. Life, which until then had been full of roughness, now seemed to stretch out peacefully towards the future where I did not perceive insuperable obstacles.

What happened after the initial euphoria

There were various moments in which I practiced *Kriya* in this way and every time after a few days from the practice I could observe a strange effect that I certainly did not expect. In fact, I felt the sensation of no longer having a "skin." Let's think of an anthill that has been disturbed: countless ants move chaotically. Similarly, my environment seemed more agitated, at times aggressive towards me.

Often, not always, it happened that, after even a long absence, some friends came to see me to talk about various problems that they did not know how to solve. The issues we discussed prompted me to make integral changes in my attitude. I found it difficult to face what seemed to me difficult challenges that up to that moment I had been able to avoid. All this forced me to get out of my usual state of calm and use my rational abilities seriously. I made an intense effort to consider the various problems they exposed me.

I was struck by a rather unusual phenomenon. I seemed to perceive – not only with awareness but, strangely, also with the body – what was happening in their consciousness. I want to be clear, I am not referring to "telepathic" perceptions. I'm talking about experiencing a state of mind that you know cannot be yours, that has no reason to exist, that is totally foreign to your being.

At this point it occurred to me that my *Kriya* practice had had an effect on those people! How was this possible, what sense could it have? It seemed impossible to me, a daydream. I couldn't tell if mine was a misleading impression or a fact.

Could I really believe that my spiritual practices had an influence on the reality around me, thus causing things to happen that otherwise would not have happened or that would have happened in a different way?

This was a possibility I had never thought of before and which I now thought, rationally speaking, impossible. What was happening to me looked like an invention of my imagination.

It is well known that the mind is good when it comes to clutching at straws; but as these events repeated themselves over time, then I could not ignore this phenomenon. I know that what I write evokes the most daring *New Age* manias. It is only because of my dedication to total sincerity that I have made the decision to describe this particular experience.

Fascinating hypothesis

After some time, I began to think about the following possibility. Perhaps every authentic spiritual path has an "ascent" and a "descent" phase. The "ascent" phase is what is commonly understood as the "mystical path." The "descent" phase instead occurs when a mystic feels in his heart the

suffering, the problems of other people and agrees to do something to try to solve them. Rarely has this last phase been considered, in the lives of mystics, as a complementary effect to their spiritual journey.

It is not easy to accept the idea that the spiritual realization of a single human being has an effect on the people who are close to him. How do an individual's spiritual efforts affect those who are related to him in any way? Now this fact could be considered not entirely impossible. Certainly moving towards spiritual realization means acting in ways inconceivable to reason.

Let us try to delimit the phenomenon we are trying to examine. We consider the many people who claim to love humanity as "their great Self", who say they send "good vibrations" or "pious intentions" to humanity ... We know these are just words, they are statements made within a banal emotional state of mind, which reveal nothing real.

But in studying the biographies of the mystics, we instead encounter examples of how they agreed to take upon themselves, to dissolve it, the burden of other people's suffering. I remember how *Padre Pio of Pietrelcina* felt the pain of dying several times, being metaphysically close to some wounded soldiers who were dying far from home, on the battlefield.

Lahiri Mahasaya himself suffered. Let's think of that famous episode when he felt "drowning" in the bodies of people who had suffered a shipwreck in a distant sea. He did not ask, did not try to attract such an experience to himself. But he fully accepted it and we do not know, but we can guess, what supreme comfort he was able to bring to those poor souls.

Sharing the pain of other human beings in one's body with the aim of decreasing it and canceling it is a possible fact.

Now, *Lahiri Mahasaya* and other saints are a mirror for us who practice *Kriya Yoga*. What happened in the life of the mystics may one day happen in ours. We are certainly far from the sublime state of consciousness of *Lahiri Mahasaya*: we do not have the spiritual realization, the devotion and the ability to surrender to the Divine that the saints have, but we can patiently turn our hearts towards this new dimension of the spiritual path.

Does destiny have similar sufferings in store for us too?

If we constantly and inexorably exclude our participation in the pain of others, then our spiritual adventure will fall apart. This is what I am genuinely led to think.

What we can do then is to try to perfect our *Kriya Pranayama* unlimitedly. Each effort to carry out the practice of *Pranayama* with a breath aimed at reaching the cells of the body can bring us closer to this

very fascinating dimension of the spiritual: that of the Divine which is found within matter as well as within the consciousness of the whole of humanity.

I think the cells in our body are like doors leading to that dimension. What can happen when this reality becomes part of our life, not as an object of theoretical speculation, but as a practical experience to be touched by hand?

Lahiri Mahasaya said: "The whole universe is in the body; the whole universe is the final Self." I believe the time has come to begin to understand and accept the implications of this statement!

The alternative

Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Seeking heaven's rest or the spirit's wordless peace,
Or in bodies motionless like statues, fixed
In tranced cessations of their sleepless thought
Sat sleeping souls, and this too was a dream.

(Sri Aurobindo, Savitri; Book X - Canto IV)

What does it mean: "... and this too was a dream"? We cannot live this life with a mind always focused on enjoying spiritual pleasures, or refined emotions, with a heart fictitiously open to universal love but in reality hard and resistant as a stone.

In this situation our achievements instead of being a state of enlightenment would risk resembling a chronic state of sleepiness. Those who want to live in a heavenly dimension without being disturbed by anything want to actually live in illusion – a golden illusion, but still an illusion.

By virtue of a universal law, the last phase of our spiritual path could contemplate a difficult experience: sharing part of the suffering of others. This event could even imply a momentary loss of our spiritual realization. Truly this is a difficult test, which only true surrender to the Divine can justify. But let's not despair.

There is a statement attributed to the mythical *Babaji* (who in turn quoted the *Bhagavad Gita*): "Even a little practice of this (inner) religious rite will save you from great fear and colossal suffering."

In my opinion "great fears and colossal sufferings" arise from contact with the swamps of the *Collective Unconscious*. Well, the perfection of *Pranayama* with the energy descending into the cells of the body will surely mitigate this probable suffering.

Will we be able to cross the various layers of darkness that are in us, as well as in the minds of our brothers? The alternative is to wait for life

itself to exert a strong downward pull on us, forcing us to accept some physical suffering that forces us to focus attention on the body. Bringing intense concentration on the cells of our body is, in my opinion, something that completes the work of *Pranayama*.

For me, the tendency of some people who consider themselves spiritual to consider their body to be something of little importance is inappropriate. These people tend to forget the world and get lost in their dream. Indeed, how could their negative moods and depression be explained? Sometimes they know the blackest despair.

St. John of the Cross called this state: "*The Dark Night of the soul*". He explained that those souls feel as though God has suddenly abandoned them; they even doubt the validity of their spiritual path. Although their conscience is totally turned towards the Divine, they continue to believe that they are "sinners", with no possibility of salvation. In a long and profound absence of light and hope, while feeling the inclination to proceed with outward expressions of faith, they reach the stage where they doubt the existence of God. Therefore they feel hopelessly impure, lost for eternity.

It is also true (but less frequent) that there have been souls who did not forget the world, indeed who had no other goal than to diminish the suffering of their fellow men, yet they too knew the "*Dark Night of the soul*."

Well, I believe that these sufferings can be mitigated or resolved entirely by learning to guide, without ever giving up, awareness in the cells of our body. I believe that our body represents the best protection for any negative mood.

When it seems impossible to reconnect with that deep inspiration that once guided us towards the spiritual path, when innocence seems to be definitively lost and we see nothing but an immense dark wall that definitively blocks every little step we take towards total consecration to the Divine, that it is time to descend, with the method that is most congenial to us, towards the cells of the body to meet that dimension known to very few that Mère evoked speaking of "abysses of truth and oceans of smiles that lie behind the august peaks of truth."

By perfecting our *Pranayama* we will approach an experience of incredible beauty: the Divine immanent in matter. I believe Sri Aurobindo was referring to this very possibility when he wrote:

Now the wasteland, now the silence;
A blank dark wall, and behind it heaven.
(Sri Aurobindo, from: "Journey's End")

Final note: the concept of the Collective Unconscious

The *Collective Unconscious* represents a part of our Unconscious which is common to the whole of humanity. Jung ⁷ introduced a terminology that allows us to probe an aspect of the mystical path that would otherwise risk becoming totally alien, not only to our capacity for expression, but also for understanding. Jung discovered that our human psyche is made up of several layers, part of it is shared with humanity and is called the *Collective Unconscious*.

For Freud the Unconscious was like a repository full of old "repressed" things, contents that we cannot recall to consciousness – rejected by an almost automatic act of the will. Jung discovered a deeper level: the *Collective Unconscious* which connects all human beings via a deeper layer of their psyche. It must be said that the contents of the *Collective Unconscious* have never been part of our consciousness, and when even an infinitesimal part of them bursts into our psyche, we are momentarily shocked.

Nevertheless the influence that the *Collective Unconscious* has on our life is, on occasion, vital! When we feel helpless as we face difficult problems, this deepest layer of our unconscious mind puts us in touch with the totality of human experience, a huge storehouse of objective wisdom where all possible solutions are. This can save us!

A typical consequence of contacting the *Collective Unconscious* is to witness an innumerable series of "*Significant Coincidences*." They occur in so many ways that we cannot even imagine. Jung laid a rational basis for the study of this controversial topic in "*Synchronicity. as the Principle of Acausal Connections*".

To explain in simple terms what it is, let's say that, in analogy to causality – which acts in the direction of the progression of time and connects two phenomena that occur in the same space at different times – the existence of a principle is hypothesized (a-causal) which connects two phenomena that occur at the same time but in different spaces. The key point to underline is that they have a meaning, a sense that binds them and that arouses deep emotion in the observer.

Now, if two events happen simultaneously but in different spaces, it is

⁷ I believe that Jung's discoveries are precious for the understanding of the mystical path – perhaps more than many other concepts formulated during the 20th century. Even though his statements never lacked the necessary prudence, the scientific community never forgave him for dealing with matters that were not considered a part of Psychiatry – such as Alchemy (deemed an absurdity), the realm of myths (considered the result of a senseless imagination) and, more than any other thing, the great value he attributed to the religious dimension; which he considered something universal and fundamentally sane, instead of a pathology. Presently the enthusiasm for his writings remains, especially among those who study topics of a spiritual and esoteric nature.

clear that causality (in the sense that the first caused the second or vice versa) is impossible. There would be nothing strange about these events in and of themselves, except one fact: the observer regards their occurrence as a significant coincidence – a near-miracle, something the universe wants to communicate to him. The observer is intimately touched by what is perceived as the mystery side of life.

Let's take an example to understand each other. A young man moves a plant into a pot, it falls, breaks and he looks at the injured plant. He thinks intensely about when his girlfriend gave him this plant as a gift. Feel emotion, feel pain. See the event as a bad omen. At the same time (this will obviously come to know later) his girlfriend is writing him a letter to leave him and thus break their relationship.

Here we see the characteristics of *Jungian Synchronicity*. The two events occur simultaneously and are connected in meaning (a vase breaks and a relationship breaks) but neither is the cause of the other. When the young man discovers the contemporaneity of the two events, he is amazed. This is not telepathy or clairvoyance; in telepathy a cause could be hypothesized, for example the existence of brain waves that are transmitted from one person to another. There is really no cause in this case. Jung explains that in this situation we only have one event in a multi-dimensional reality. The two events are actually one event, viewed simply from two different points of view.⁸

When this happens, it is as if the world is speaking to you. If it happens, and you notice that it has happened, you must not lose your common sense and begin to believe that you are endowed with extraordinary powers. It is not about telepathy, clairvoyance ... it is something much deeper. You are opening your eyes to the wonders and subtle laws of this universe.

⁸ In the esoteric literature we find the concept of *Siddhis* (powers). We are very perplex about it. Those who write books on *Yoga* are not able to resist the temptation of copying some lines from Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. It's typical to find the ridiculous warning of the danger coming from the abuse of the *Siddhis*. Quoting Patanjali (IV:1), they recount that *Siddhis* are the spiritual powers (psychic abilities) that may occur through rigorous austerities; they explain that they vary from relatively simple forms of clairvoyance, telepathy, to being able to levitate, to be present at various places at once, to become as small as an atom, to materialize objects and more. They recommend to their readers not to ever indulge in these powers since "they are a great hindrance to spiritual progress". *Indulge* - what a beautiful word! If you did see someone practicing *Pranayama* and 'indulging' in a little bi-location for fun, could you tell?! Perhaps they don't think enough about what they are writing because they let themselves be seduced by the dreams of possessing those powers. Perhaps they already visualize all the fuss which will come with it: interviews, taking part in talk shows etc. However, here, I repeat with emphasis, we are discussing quite another phenomenon!

DISCUSSIONS WITH STUDENTS OF PY's CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

This chapter is dedicated to those who are serious about proceeding on the *Kriya* path using only the techniques that can be obtained from the organizations that are spreading the teachings of PY.

Kechari Mudra Technique aside, often mentioned in the writings of PY, who surely practiced it, these devotees do not feel the need to mix PY techniques with other procedures. They feel that they are his disciples and therefore think that adopting other teachings is equivalent to not showing confidence in his teaching.⁹

When I followed the teachings of PY, our "Meditation counselor" explained to us that the worst evil was the disloyalty towards the *Guru* and his organization. By "disloyalty", she also meant the mere fact of reading what some people who had come out of the main organization had written about *Kriya Yoga*.

After my book appeared on the web, I had an intense email exchange with various researchers loyal to PY. After making it clear that they did not approve of my decision to describe *Lahiri Mahasaya's Kriya Yoga* techniques so explicitly, they asked me how I could say that PY had simplified or changed some technical details of *Kriya Yoga*.

We met. I realized that their concern was to understand if there was something important in *Kriya Yoga* that was not reported in the correspondence course, if there was therefore some technique that they did not know, but that perhaps PY had shared only with some disciples.

Those *kriyabans* were very serious, honest, highly motivated. No nonsense ever came out of their mouths. On the contrary, I listened very carefully when they challenged some of my imaginative interpretations on *Kriya Yoga*. Many, not by mere exhibition, knew how to quote by heart the phrases found in PY's writings. They had read and reread these texts many times, trying to decipher their deeper meaning.

I was positively impressed by their extraordinary dedication to the regular practice of *Kriya*, twice a day. Sometimes showing dissatisfaction with their practice that they didn't think was profound enough, they never neglected it. It was clear that they were following the *Kriya* path not out of esoteric curiosity, not to find an alternative cure for anxiety, depression, not

⁹ These techniques are in some details different from those of Lahiri Mahasaya. They are not here described, but freely commented according to my personal experience – for what its worth. I give it for granted that the reader knows them. In order to avoid confusion, I will denote them in the following way: PY's First Kriya, PY's Second Kriya.....

to develop the potentials of the mind, but for one reason only: to walk the Spiritual Path so beautifully evoked in the PY's autobiography.

I saw that they approached *Kriya Yoga* with an attitude of authentic devotion or aspiration towards the spiritual reality.

I have not met anyone who based their practice on the belief that the evolution of the person would develop by one year for each *Kriya* breath. They did not deal with this "spiritual mathematics": who in one way, who in the other proceeded with a strong motivation that came from their hearts and not from abstract mental reasoning and even less from *New Age* fantasies.

Our discussions often concerned the *Higher Kriyas*. This is easily explained. For many *kriyabans* a moment of crisis with their organization occurred when their request to obtain a seminar on *Higher Kriyas* received an incomprehensible, anachronistic, denial.

The meetings organized to review the basic teachings (*Hong So, Om technique* and *Kriya proper*) were always a source of inspiration. The disappointment was not to enjoy such an opportunity in the field of *Higher Kriyas*.¹⁰

I had wonderful conversations with them. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the main points we discussed.

[II] SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON MASTER PY

With these researchers I also had the opportunity to share the idea that I formed on Master PY. Let's start right from this point by premising an important concept.

What I have understood in recent years is the fact that the spiritual dimension cannot be reached with our human reasoning that is inspired by studying the sacred scriptures and texts of a religious nature. Spiritual reality is reached when we meet the ecstatic state through meditation or through rare events.

Therefore, before talking about a person like PY, I find it unnecessary to report what I learned about any indications regarding PY's previous lives or about possible future ideas of any of his reincarnations.

Various revelations which he himself made in this regard do not interest me as I believe that they serve no purpose other than to increase fruitless mental activity.

I don't even consider the question of whether he was a perfect *Avatar* or a human being with all the ordinary limitations of a human being. So with my friends I just shared a general idea about his personality.

¹⁰ We know that recently a couple of the organizations based upon PY's legacy proved they had understood that it doesn't pay to behave in such a way and are giving regular initiation into the *Higher Kriyas*.

What is described in his Autobiography we all knew well. In practice we have known three aspects of PY. The first aspect was what characterized his childhood and youth in India, the second aspect was that of the *yogi* lecturer who spread his teachings in the United States until his return to India and, finally, the third aspect was that of the great Master who spent his last years in the United States after the death of his Master, *Sri Yukteswar*.

We knew the first aspect roughly. His spiritual aspiration led him to the feet of various saints which occurred both before and after the meeting with his *Guru*. We also discovered his curiosity for esotericism and his various experiences on the possibilities of the human mind, even as regards the possibility of contacting disembodied souls. We knew how PY completely gave up on these last experiences. However, everything he experienced in his spiritual quest became the basis for what he later taught in the United States through lectures, books, and mailing material.

Again with regard to the first aspect, I shared with them an important piece of information which clarifies very well the reason why PY added those of *Hong So* and *Om* to the classical techniques of *Kriya Yoga*. In fact, these techniques derive from the teaching of the *Radhasoami* religious movement which I spoke of in chapter 12.

PY came into contact with the *Radhasoami* teaching through Sri Charu Chandra Basu, who was his brother-in-law Sri Satish Chandra Basu's brother, and whose house was very close to his. Charu Baba revealed to him the central part of the *Radhasoami* movement's meditation methods. It is also known that his teacher *Sri Yukteswar* was initiated into the *Radhasoami* religious movement.

Then PY was initiated into the meditation practice of the *Sant Mat* path called *Surat Shabd Yoga* (Inner Light and Sound Meditation). This event is thought to have occurred roughly between 1900 and 1910.

With intense effort young PY engaged with absolute fervor in that discipline and in a short time he was absorbed by the experience of listening in ecstasy to the *Divine Sound* and feeling the *Divine Light* and was overwhelmed. Because young PY's spiritual life was deeply rooted on the altar of his heart, that Light remained unchanged throughout his life, and the depth of that experience always remained in his awareness in the easy and difficult situations of his existence.

It is true that PY practiced the teachings of *Lahiri Mahasaya* from an early age. In fact, he engaged in the practice of the initial stages of *Kriya Yoga* that he had received from his father. Well in his mission as spiritual Master he always considered this experience of *Sound* and *Light* as a complement to *Kriya Yoga* and by complement I mean both as a

preparation before receiving the initiation to *Kriya Yoga* and as a practice never to be abandoned even after this initiation. This was a fact they accepted without reservation.

The second aspect, as revealed to us by those who knew him personally, or by researchers who carefully studied the accounts of what happened during his lectures, is that of a *yogi* who introduced Westerners to the fundamentals, integrated with *Christianity*, of ancient *Vedic* philosophy and *Hinduism*.

We learned with amazement, combined with some perplexity, that he sometimes presented himself to the public accompanied by figures who had impressed him favorably and who exhibited their apparently miraculous powers. During his numerous lectures he demonstrated mastery of the powers of the mind over the body, also dealing with everything related to the application of willpower on common life such as health, work ... While living this period of intense activity he strove to publish some didactic material which, although mainly of a spiritual nature, was presented in the form of science, using a language suitable for the contemporary era.

We have come to know the third aspect through the accounts of his main disciples. It concerns the period in which he gradually detached himself from the general public by spending his days meditating and dictating his interpretations of great spiritual texts including the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Gospels* and the *Rubaiyat* of *Omar Khayyam*. During these years he was the *Guru* who embodied a divine mission as a universal Master without close ties to a particular religious faith. The event that struck us most was the fact that he spent several hours talking with the Divine which manifested itself in the aspect of Divine Mother.

It was this aspect that was the most dear and precious to us all. We felt great gratitude to this Master for having given us his splendid Autobiography, as well as his Lessons by correspondence. His writings had given a decisive turn to our existence. Probably we would have met the spiritual path even without this book but how long we would have had to struggle to learn from various sources the most varied methods of meditation, before finding something similar to the fantastic *Kriya Yoga* that he had so enthusiastically told us about!

I knew how my life had changed for the better after reading and rereading this book and put his teachings into practice for many years. All friends who regularly practiced his teachings could say the same thing. This is what emerged from our sharing and we all agreed on this.

Note

These encounters with these good and sincere people forced me to ask myself a burning question. Since I had acknowledged that, even with painful hesitation, I had abandoned the idea of following the teachings of PY in their entirety and I had approached, through a laborious research, the teaching of *Lahiri Mahasaya*, I had to reflect a lot to have a clear vision of what, in the depths of my being, had happened and to understand the reasons for this choice of mine.

I believe that this detachment began to occur when, after trying to review the lessons of his correspondence course, I began to perceive a large portion of those teachings as an unnecessary burden on my way of thinking. I felt that this part of the teachings did not help me to achieve what I was looking for. There were in fact various precious teachings that I had to look for outside these Lessons. To understand, for example, the value of *Japa* to perfect the practice of *Kriya Yoga* I had to seek inspiration to practice it by studying the spiritual movement of *Hesychasm* – see chapter 12.

So when I encountered (via the book *Purana Purusha* I mentioned in the first part of this book) *Lahiri Mahasaya's* thinking and was shocked by his simple but explosively illuminating vision of the spiritual path, I realized how simple and clear were the principles to keep in mind to face the practice of *Kriya Yoga*. Anything that went beyond that essential core of ideas was for me a useless surplus. For this I embraced the vision of *Lahiri Mahasaya* which I perceived as immaculate and clear crystalline water.

Now I look at the activity of the organization founded by PY. This organization undoubtedly does a great and very useful work. But the fact that PY created a monastic order with very strict rules, as happened for many religious paths, seems to me far from the teaching of *Lahiri Mahasaya*. I know that for some, the ideal of monastic life may appear to be the best way to walk the spiritual path but I also know that for many, entering this dimension has been a bitter disappointment.

In conclusion, leaving aside what does not concern me, I feel perfectly happy with my practice of *Kriya Yoga* following only the teachings of *Lahiri Mahasaya*. But the awareness that this path of mine started right from PY's writings remains a fixed point and therefore in me there is an immovable sense of gratitude for this Master.

[III] SOME REMARKS ON THE FIRST KRIYA OF PY

It is wise to begin the meditation routine with *Maha Mudra* followed by *Kriya Pranayama* or *Kriya proper*. Experience teaches that it is better to practice the *Hong so* and *Om* techniques after the practice of *Kriya proper*.

This fact was clear enough for those researchers even if it seemed to contradict the advice given by the organization which was to start the practice with these latest techniques.

Speaking of *Kriya Pranayama*, it was clear to me that it is effective both if practiced with the mouth open or half closed or closed. One might begin the practice with the mouth open for a certain number of breaths and then close it for an equal or greater number of breaths.

It seems that PY had a very clear idea that a *kriyaban* should not continue to breathe through the mouth forever but should progress towards *Kechari Mudra*.

As for *Kechari Mudra*, some *kriyabans* have achieved it.¹¹ One of them had a strange opinion: in fact he stated that *Pranayama* with *Kechari* was too "weak", lacking the strong sensations in the spine that you perceive when you practice *Pranayama* with your mouth open. It is clear that this friend thought a lot before making the decision to give up *Kechari Mudra*.

Recalling that episode, I think the problem was the beauty of the breath sounds obtained with the mouth open or half closed. The fact is that with the mouth closed and the tongue in *Kechari Mudra* (even the baby *Kechari*) the sound is destined to become as clean and beautiful as that of a flute. This flute-like sound is experienced after serious practice, when the spine is "clean" like a hollow tube.

One fact that every *kriyaban* should know is that there are two versions of *Kriya proper*, one taught in 1930 and one, more recent. In my opinion, a serious *kriyaban* should be able to experience both. The first version agrees perfectly with the description of *Kriya* found in AOY: "The *Kriya Yogi* mentally directs his life energy to revolve upward and downward, around the six spinal centers", while it does not coincide with the procedure currently given.

However, to conclude the discourse on *Kriya Pranayama*, there is no doubt that this procedure as taught by PY is very valid even if it is normal to continuously improve it.

¹¹ PY in his writings and in his talks gave the definition of *Kechari Mudra* without introducing any practical exercises to be performed over a certain period of time in order to achieve it.

Hong So Technique

Together with these researchers I tried to discuss whether it had been PY's mistake to introduce the *Mantra Hong So* instead of the traditional *So Ham*, or rather, to be precise: *Sa* with inhalation and *Ham* with exhalation. This is also written in the ancient texts on *Yoga*. In them it is prescribed to try to listen to the sound of the breath and realize that it is really *Sa Ham*. It is observed that when the breath calms down, this sound is also perceived in the *Kutastha* and gradually it becomes the sound of *Om*.

It is clear that we did not find an answer to this question. Instead we talked about the fact that after *Kriya proper* (and also after the eventual *Jyoti Mudra*) it is possible to practice this technique also in the spine. I proposed two reflections on the basic technique.

a) Let's start by talking about the importance of never allowing a rhythm to be established in mental chanting *Hong So*. If, while mentally chanting this *Mantra*, you follow a rhythm, this rhythm will never calm down. Your mind can never bring you into the state of calm breathing. So do not allow the relentless rhythm of the litany: "*Hong So, Hong So, Hong So, Hong So ...*" to continue indefinitely, as relentless as the repetitive rattle of the steel wheels of a train!

If the body is in the physiological condition of remaining without breathing for long moments, the rhythm must not allow the process of inhaling and exhaling to continue undeterred. If you do not allow the pauses to exist, they will NEVER exist and you will never realize that you are in a position to have the liberating experience of the breathless state.

So you have to be keenly aware of each pause. You have to accept it, respect it, immerse yourself in it, no matter if it lasts very little!

b) The pause after inhalation is different from that after exhalation. In normal breathing there is a tendency to exhale immediately after inhalation. Breathing in, the rib-cage expands, albeit very slightly, and therefore, there is an elastic force, no matter how small, which tends to be released immediately at the end of the inhalation. Practicing the *Hong So* technique well then means not allowing the natural reflex to exhale as soon as the inhalation is completed, making a (albeit very short) pause impossible. Therefore, after inhaling it is necessary to wait gently and without any forcing, for the impulse to exhale naturally to appear. You have to feel this urge. It is precisely this detail that many people do not understand. They believe that waiting for this impulse means to control the breath and therefore to fail to the main command obeyed by the *Hong So* technique: not to control the breath, to leave it natural. We only say that the pause must be able to take place. We must not annihilate this possibility

from the start. Obviously when the urge to exhale appears, exhale.

As for practicing this technique in the spine, we observe that it is possible to visualize one's breath rising and falling into the spine with *Hooooong* and *Sooooo*. No control – the breath is free. You can go on like this for a few minutes, then, when the breath is so short that the procedure seems to disappear and become nothing, you can try to feel this short breath as it happens in each *Chakra*. A short, almost invisible breath takes place in *Muladhara* and is merged with the sweet chanting of *Hong* and *So*. This breath is like a peaceful vibration in a silent mind. Then place your concentration on the second *Chakra*: here another breath takes place, then another breath takes place in the third *Chakra* ... and so on ... up and down along the spine ... until there is no more breath.

If you practice in this way, a "virtuous circle" between this growing inner calm and the reduced need for oxygen begins. This leads to an extraordinary result even for those who think they are just bungling beginners. You are flying along the spinal tunnel to a state of heavenly tranquility. In time you will realize the truth contained in the words of a great disciple of PY: "I have learned to live by inner joy. " (J.J. Lynn)

Om meditation technique

Contrary to what some people think, the *Om* meditation technique works. It works if you practice it as it is taught: in the recommended position, with the elbow rest, closing the ears as taught, without ear plugs to close the ears, mentally chanting *Om, Om, Om* ... for as long as possible, with total commitment to internal listening without ever being discouraged.

Often the hands go numb and you no longer feel them: that is the time to proceed undeterred. Usually the exact moment is not known when listening to the inner sounds begins. The experience is this: at a certain moment you realize that you have been listening to them for some time and, simply, you don't know how, you didn't notice. I believe that this can be explained by the fact that the inner sounds do not in fact appear when the mind continues to work with thought, but only when it is perfectly empty, even empty of the consciousness of the ego, or even of the fact that you are practicing a certain *Yoga* technique. When you reach total emptiness (to some this appears as having entered a sleep-like state), when the repetition of the *Mantra* has produced a transformation, then you are surprised by the inner sounds and you become softly aware of them.

Great inner experiences arise from this practice. But it is necessary to devote the necessary time to this technique. I believe that after the *Om* technique no other procedure should follow.

[III] SOME REMARKS ON THE THIRD KRIYA OF PY

I explained to my friends that a *kriyaban* could receive a great benefit from the practice of PY's *Third Kriya* by prefacing it with an incremental routine without head movements and only later tackling the complete technique by practicing a second incremental routine of it.¹² These researchers knew nothing about the concept of incremental routine: I explained to them its importance in reference to any *Kriya Yoga* technique.

The reason for my advice is that the practice of the *Third Kriya* requires having learned the art of experiencing a long and deep breath which gently passes through *Chakra* after *Chakra*. This must be perceived very clearly.

Preliminary practice and complete practice

In my opinion, when confronted with this technique, it is good, for a long time, to be concerned only with one fact: that one's consciousness learns to move along the spinal tunnel. The ability that is reached after months or years of *Kriya proper* is good to use in guiding the awareness in the first *Chakra*, then in the second... and so on *Chakra* after *Chakra*, up to *Kutastha* and then, going back, up to *Muladhara*. This must happen in a state of absolute immobility, mentally repeating the 12 syllables of the *Mantra* typical of *Lahiri Mahasaya's Higher Kriyas*. The breath is calm, very subtle, almost imperceptible. A micro pause takes place in each *Chakra* ["micro" means without losing continuity.] One realizes that there is a force born in the abdominal region which allows the *Prana* to move. If the breath feels "too calm, almost imperceptible", this is not an indication of wrong practice but of correct practice.

In my experience it is very helpful to gradually increase the number of repetitions. I followed this plan: I started with 25 reps, once a day, for two weeks. Then 50 reps a day for another two weeks. Then 75 reps a day for another two weeks...then 100...and so on, increasing by 25 by 25 until I was doing 200 reps a day for two weeks. And then? Then I know that one is ready for the real *Third Kriya* procedure. I mean that in the state of consciousness in which one is now one will be able to get the most out of using the *Third Kriya* procedure as it is explained in the lessons.

Now the breath is very, very subtle. One notices that the current in the spine begins to move spontaneously. While focused, one does not force the process of raising the energy on the inhale and lets it fall naturally on the exhale.

The incremental plan is the same: 25 repetitions of the technique each day, once a day, for two weeks. Then 50 repetitions a day for two more weeks.... 75 100... 125 150... 175200 for two weeks! Of

¹² To clarify what an incremental routine is, see chapter 13 in the third part of the book.

course it's important that head movements take place in a very delicate way to avoid stressing the cervical vertebrae!

The power this plan can set in motion is indescribable. Unfortunately if one doesn't have the courage to overcome the prescribed 12 repetitions of *Third Kriya*, he will never realize the power contained in this technique! It is good therefore to increase the number of repetitions, increase without fear and finish the routine by further trying to calm the breath and reach the breathless state.

I didn't talk about the *Fourth Kriya* with these friends as they thought that once the *Third* had been mastered, the *Fourth* would manifest itself, in all its power. Although I am well aware of the lessons of the correspondence course, it is still not clear to me what was, according to PY, the best action to carry out, or in any case to abandon oneself to, after having completed the daily practice of these procedures. I can try to imagine what is most reasonable action to take but unfortunately I will never know what happened in the body of that great *Yogi* who was PY.

[IV] MY CONSIDERATIONS ON PY'S SECOND KRIYA

It has been explained that the actual *Second Kriya* would be PY's *Third Kriya*, while PY's *Second Kriya* is a meditation technique which is not based on a form of *Pranayama* but on a deep concentration on the *Chakras* by listening to the inner sounds and perceiving the spiritual light coming from them. This technique is an evolution of the *Om meditation technique*, and PY probably learned it from the *Radhasoami* tradition. It helps to locate, physically and astrally, the seat of each *Chakra*.

Those who practice may, for a long time, be unable to perceive either the astral sounds of the *Chakras* or the colors of each of them on the *Kutastha* screen. One must be prepared to do a very deep work before obtaining tangible results. Over the years, I don't think I've ever met a *kriyaban* who has told me that he regularly practices this technique. I have always tried to recommend putting it into practice when they found the time to practice it.

The fact that this technique is clearly different from the *Second Kriya* as handed down by tradition has created confusion in the hearts and minds of some students. I have known some who have given up practicing this technique without fully testing its potential. The idea that their *Guru* had introduced an intermediary technique between the *First* and the authentic *Second Kriya* had created a serious conflict in them. Perhaps that was precisely why they had come to talk to me. Maybe they were hoping I could clear up some discomfort.

With this motivation (but not only because of this) some friends had visited a couple of PY *Ashrams* in India and talked to some monks who lived in this organisation. Some brought back rather confusing information. In fact, they asserted that the *Higher Kriyas* as they are practiced in these centers are different from the techniques that we practice based on the correspondence course! All this seemed highly unlikely to me.

I trust what a friend told me. He had formally asked an Indian monk disciple of PY to review his *Kriya*. He told me that this monk was surprised that the request also concerned a check of the *Higher Kriyas*. This was not a common occurrence. While listening to my friend's description of how he practiced the *Second Kriya*, the monk seemed not to understand well which procedure my friend was referring to. There was a moment of clear embarrassment. Then the monk composed himself and gave a general instruction on the movement of energy in the spine and on meditation in general.

The following day that monk again wanted to speak with my friend. He apologized for having manifested a clear hesitation in listening to my friend. Then he mentioned a very particular fact: he revealed that when PY left the body, this was a shock for the whole organization. Many things still had to be decided. The correspondence course was not yet completed. Some parts would have to be reconsidered in the future. This monk said that perhaps he had received something a little different than what my friend had received. However, he concluded that people who sincerely feel that they are PY's disciples should always follow the instructions received from her organization. There is no doubt that one must have sincere trust in one's *Guru*, or else everything collapses. He therefore encouraged my friend to faithfully follow PY's teachings and practice applying what is written in the correspondence course.

Of course, that monk could not say otherwise. I think that in that *Ashram* lived people who had been initiated into some *Higher Kriya* in the pure tradition of *Lahiri Mahasaya* and had not limited themselves to studying the lessons of the correspondence course provided by the organization in which they now operated.

But let's try to understand the greatness of PY's *Second Kriya*. This technique transforms you deeply even if it doesn't produce immediately perceptible effects.

I think it is the best conclusion of the long phase of one's spiritual path where *Pranayama* was enriched with the procedures of the *Third* and *Fourth Kriya*. In fact, these techniques dissolve various obstacles in the

spine, especially the obstacle related to the heart *Chakra*. At this point of one's spiritual path, facing the practice of PY's *Second Kriya* and facing it seriously with unlimited patience turns out to be a project of formidable value.

What does it mean to "facing it seriously"? In the past I heard that a representative of my organization, considered very expert, stated that "the correct practice of the *Second Kriya* usually requires a concentration for about 20-30 minutes on each *Chakra*. Only in this way would such centers be perceived." This statement puzzled me as I find it somewhat exaggerated. I don't think this is the time required for a "serious" practice. "Facing it seriously" means dedicating yourself to this practice every day, for months and months, without expecting to obtain glaring effects.

What I can say is that if one dedicates a time ranging between 20 and 40 minutes to this technique, it will produce a deep inner transformation even if the *kriyaban* will perceive little or almost nothing of what the description of the technique states that the practitioner should feel. PY's *Second Kriya* focuses all awareness on each of the *Chakras*: in due course, this constant work changes the *kriyaban*'s approach towards the spiritual path.

Apparently this procedure takes place in the spine, actually it takes place in *Kutastha*. *Kutastha* has several layers, which resemble the layers of an onion. One begins the practice of the *Second Kriya* by becoming aware of the outermost level of *Kutastha* which is the *Muladhara Chakra*! One focuses on *Muladhara* and therefore perceives the outermost "shell" of *Kutastha*, then concentrates on *Swadhisthana* and therefore has a deeper perception of *Kutastha*. The same will happen with the third *Chakra* and with all the subsequent ones.

By continuing to move the center of concentration from *Chakra* to *Chakra*, one learns to move in the spinal tunnel. The experience will allow you to travel the spine in all its entirety. In this way the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* will be continuously deepened. One could be able to hear the sound of *Om* during *Kriya Pranayama* without closing the ears!

The quality of *Kriya Pranayama* will improve giving the sensation of flying through the different regions of an inner sky. The *Om* vibration will take on a slightly different tone in each *Chakra*.

The experience of a *Kriya Pranayama* so extraordinarily enriched will be the reason to consider PY's *Second Kriya* as the most profound procedure to be practiced in the last part of life. Total dedication to this practice will produce such an intensity of devotion that one will be surprised to discover it in one's life.

APPENDIX

INDEX

1. How I approached the Tummo technique
2. Beautiful variant of Navi Kriya
3. First intuition of the Kriya of the cells
4. How I approached the original Fourth Kriya
5. How I approached the original Fifth Kriya
6. Four practices that can be useful
7. Use of the 50 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet in the Second Kriya of Swami Hariharananda

APPENDIX N.1 HOW I APPROACHED THE TUMMO TECHNIQUE

Shortly after posting the first edition of this book on the net, an American researcher proposed a variant of *Navi Kriya* to me. He called this variant *Nabhi Kundalini*. It was the first time I encountered the practice of *Tummo* like this. I don't remember if he told me about the *Tibetan* origin of this technique. At the time I didn't have time to experiment with this procedure.

Several years later, another American researcher wrote to me. He told me that he had learned from a certain *Kriya* school what was called "*Third Level*". He had practiced the *First* and *Second Levels* of this school without striking effects. The *First Level* was *Kriya Pranayama*, the *Second* was a simple form of *Thokar*. The effects obtained from these first two levels could never have made him foresee the effect that this *Third Level* would have on him.

He enthusiastically practiced the *Third Level* and obtained results that left him speechless. He described this technique to me: I saw that it was unequivocally the *Tibetan* technique of *Tummo*. He related that when he received this "*Third Level*", the teacher asked him to limit his practice to just a couple of repetitions a day. For a few weeks he did this, but as he became more proficient he began to increase his daily reps sometimes as radically as when he started practicing up to 100 reps in one sitting! He explained that it was this "*Third Kriya*" that completely changed his life. He explained to me that with this technique he began to realize all the power of *Kriya*! Something important actually happened; ecstasy arrived every day and, together, joy and an expansion of one's emotional spectrum. But over time it became difficult for him to deal properly with "worldly matters" and as life became more complicated, all this practice

spontaneously disappeared from his life.

Gradually he adjusted to the necessities of life, but it took about five years for the ecstasies and other effects that had become his normal way of life to diminish and eventually fade away.

Having read this testimony, an intuition of its value lit up in me and I decided to practice it every day. I found it tremendously effective. I have never left her since. I have seen that this technique, when practiced in a gentle way has a marked effect on calming the breath. I think that this practice, like few others, is able to give birth to the spiritual life.

Standard method of practicing Tummo

Inhale and divide this inhalation into three parts. You attract *Prana* from the ether. It enters through *Kutastha* and accumulates in the fifth *Chakra*. The length of this first part of the inspiration is about 3 seconds. Here is a short break where you hold your breath and practice a light *Mula Bandha*.

Now continue the inhalation by attracting the *Prana* from the fifth *Chakra* to the fourth. There is another short pause here where you hold your breath and increase the intensity of the *Mula Bandha*. Then you complete the inhalation by drawing the *Prana* from the fourth *Chakra* to the *Dantian*.

The *Dantian* is the size of a ball whose diameter is approximately two-and-a-half inches long. To locate its position one must concentrate on the navel, coming approximately one and a half inches back and below for the same extent.

Hold your breath. Maximize *Mula Bandha* intensity and add *Jalandhara Bandha*. Contract the diaphragm and firmly compress the *Prana* that you have attracted downwards from above. *Prana* is thus blocked, compressed both from above and below. Continue to hold your breath. Feel the rising heat overflowing from the *Dantian* to the surrounding abdominal region. Maintain the hold as long as it is comfortable (a mental count is optimal).

At a certain moment relax the *Mula Bandha* and take a long exhalation feeling the *Prana* rise in the heart center and in the *Kutastha*. This is one *Tummo* breath. Practice at least a dozen of these breaths.

I add here an information I found in the *Tummo* literature. The following passage refers to what happens by increasing the number of *Tummo* breaths.

"By performing **ten** breathing cycles of *Tummo*, one is able to feel the heat of the flame of a candle in the navel. With the next **ten** breathing cycles, the navel and its surrounding area will be filled with heat. The next **ten**

breathing cycles cause the lower body to experience heat. Another **ten** breathing cycles move the heat upward towards the heart region. With these 40 *Tummo* breaths the knot of the heart (*Granti*) melts.

Another **ten** breaths and the flame is moved upward to the Throat *Chakra*. The next **ten** breathing cycles raise the flame towards the *Ajna Chakra*. The last **ten** breathing cycles lead him to the seventh *Chakra*.

40 + 30 breaths is a great result. From now on there is no more practice using the breath. The *Paravastha* state (the real *Paravastha*) totally absorbs the awareness of the person who has reached this elevated state of consciousness. It is explained that this is the way to untie the knot of *Rudra Granti* (or *Shiva Granti*) found in the *Ajna Chakra*."

Those interested in trying this experience can increase the number of *Tummo* breaths from 12 to 24 and so on. An intensity of energy occurs in the fourth *Chakra* and then subsequently in the head. This is a good result, but it is important to always decrease the intensity of the breaths: everything must proceed in an increasingly subtle way. One will most likely have a beautiful vision of the spirit eye.

APPENDIX N.2 BEAUTIFUL VARIANT OF NAVI KRIYA

When I decided to start an incremental routine of *Navi Kriya*, I preferred to use a variant of it that came from the tradition of ancient China.

This technique involves a very effective work on the *Dantian*. As I have explained elsewhere the *Dantian* is located about two and one-half inches below the navel and about one and one-half inches inside: it can be visualized as a sphere about four centimeters in diameter.

Entering the *Dantian* with awareness is an action with a very profound value. This technique absorbs the attention in *Dantian* in a much more intense way than that produced by the classic *Navi Kriya*.

How to practice

Take a short inhalation and feel the sensation of the rising energy. Tilt your head slightly forward. Now practice a long exhalation during which you perceive the energy that descends from the forehead along a path outside the body, moves towards the navel, crosses it and reaches the *Dantian*.

During this long exhalation, *Om* is mentally chanted, rapidly, 10 to 15 times, participating with concentration in the descent of energy along the way.

After a brief stop in the *Dantian*, a short inhalation raises the energy in the head again. Simultaneously the chin rises. Everything now repeats itself but the descent of the energy takes place along a different path. The head bends, not forward, but on the *left* shoulder – the face is not turned, you always look forward. A long exhalation (together with the chant of *Om, Om, Om ...*) accompanies the downward movement of the energy that

descends from the left side of the brain, moves along a path outside the body to its left – as if shoulder and arm are not existed. The energy descends to the left side of the belt, passes through it and moves towards the *Dantian*.

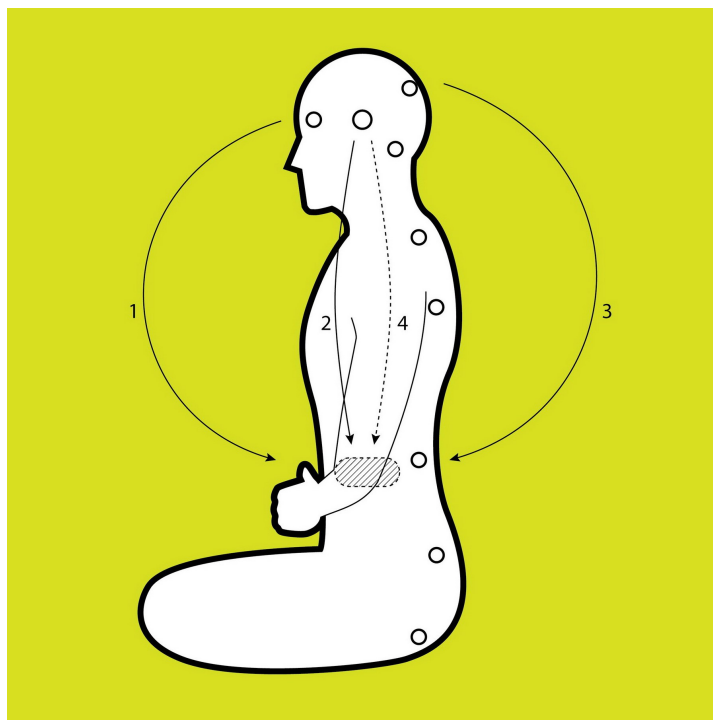


Fig.20 The energy enters the *Dantian* along four directions

After a brief stop in the *Dantian*, a short inhalation raises the energy in the head again. Simultaneously the chin rises. Now the head tilts *back*. A long exhalation (together with the chant of *Om, Om, Om ...*) accompanies the downward movement of the energy that starts from the occipital area and moves (outside the body) down towards the belt where it bends, passes through the third *Chakra Manipura* and move towards the *Dantian*. After a short break in the *Dantian*, the procedure is repeated in the same way on the *right* side.

This last exhalation closes the small cycle consisting of four exhalations accompanied by four descents of the energy towards the belt and, crossing it, towards the *Dantian* region. In this cycle you have imagined four spirals that shrink from the outside and enter the *Dantian*. This mini cycle is repeated 9 times. In conclusion there are $4 \times 9 = 36$ energy descents. What we have described can last from 8 to 10 minutes and is equivalent to the 4 repetitions of the basic form of *Navi Kriya*.

Note for those who practice an incremental routine of this variant of Navi Kriya

When you practice more than 36×4 descents of energy, the movements of the head become less pronounced: they are barely noticeable. In other

words, the movement of the chin forward, backward, and sideways is reduced to a couple of millimeters! This comes spontaneously as the practice becomes internalized.

What happens to your breath after a large number of repetitions of this procedure is a noteworthy phenomenon! This practice in fact transforms the quality of your breath.

Let's try to describe this experience: at the same time you formulate the will to exhale, you will feel as if the lungs are unable to move. It is as if they were blocked, as if they had a great resistance to move and then to contract.

A few moments later you will have the awareness of some subtle thing starting to descend into the body. You will experience a new way of exhaling, like a mental act, like an inner pressure that extends everywhere. This will produce a particular sense of well-being, harmony and freedom. You will have the feeling that you can stay like this forever. Logic tells you that the breath still comes out of the nose, however you would swear this is not the case.

This technique has the power to clarify things that, from an emotional and sentimental point of view, are an insoluble mystery to you. It is as if a personality that is much stronger and more determined than your normal personality comes out of your depths.

APPENDIX N.3 FIRST INTUITION OF THE KRIYA OF THE CELLS

An unsuccessful period of my life occurred when some friends and I received a couple of initiations from some "minor" teachers who had once been the right hand of some illustrious *Guru* and then went on their own as their teacher had taken away their power to initiate. We formed the idea that such teachers were mediocre, sometimes uneducated and immoral.

Some episodes also confirmed the impression of mental instability. They knew little about *Kriya Yoga* and taught it superficially, yet we believed that they taught " *Original Kriya* " and this made us blind. For this reason alone we treated them with a respectful or tolerant attitude, forgiving them when they betrayed our trust.

We accepted the farce that initiations were an inevitable inconvenience to acquire the information we were so passionately seeking.

Generally speaking after a few ceremonies, the explanations were always quick and superficial.

At the end of each initiation I tried to convince myself that I had found something valuable. Often a vague sense of well-being perceived by practicing a new technique for the first time was proof of the excellence of the technique itself. I did not realize that in doing so I had made my ego the

compass needle of my spiritual journey. I did not realize that my previous achievements – listening to the *Om* vibration, the breathless state ... – were no longer with me: I had forgotten them! It was like I was hypnotized.

I did not want to accept that the new initiation had only added something insignificant to what I already knew and was getting used to living in a new "cage" from which I would soon be escaping.

For many of us, collecting new techniques was like a vice. At almost all initiation seminars a solemn promise of secrecy was the password to be accepted. Each made this promise but as soon as the session was over, some communicated the news gained to other students via mobile phones who, in turn, would take part in other initiations and return the favor.

The way of thinking that I developed following these teachers led me to meet a particular school where *Kriya Yoga* was radically deprived of the classic *Higher Kriyas* and combined with various teachings of the classic forms of *Yoga*. I want to leave a brief note on this school where I touched the poorest point of my research but which allowed me to have a first intuition of the *Kriya of the cells*.

For some friends who followed me on this path, this became the occasion of a bitter disappointment and marked the definitive abandonment of the spiritual search. This school was very far from the teachings of *Lahiri Mahasaya*. The *Kriya Yoga* that was taught was based on the teachings of an Indian figure who claimed to be a direct disciple of *Babaji*. The school presented three levels of *Kriya* that could be received within three years, sometimes even just two. The prospect of having found a source from which to learn all about *Kriya* excited me enormously.

The book that served as an introduction to this school was very strange: its illustrations made one think of being in front of a fairy tale. In this book there was no mention of techniques such as *Talabya Kriya*, *Kechari Mudra*, *Navi Kriya*, *Omkar Pranayama*, *Thokar* The main technique was called *Kriya Kundalini Pranayama*. It was combined with many other teachings grouped under four main denominations: *Hatha Yoga*, *Dhyana Yoga*, *Mantra Yoga* and *Bhakti Yoga*.

The first instructions I received did not disappoint me, however I was perplexed. The teacher was obsessed with the precept never to hold the breath, thus removing the *Yoni Mudra* technique. Although it was fundamental for *Lahiri Mahasaya* it was considered dangerous and therefore prohibited.

The *Kriya Kundalini Pranayama* of this school was undoubtedly a beautiful technique. The core of the *Second Level* was the initiation into Indian *Mantras*. The day of initiation was preceded by a day of silence; enraptured, we listened to a splendid lesson on the usefulness of practicing

Japa. There were other teachings that left me perplexed but I endured everything as I placed all my hope in the third level.

The final *Third Level* was an excruciating disappointment. There were no actual *Higher Kriyas* but classical *Yoga* techniques, appropriate for a *Kriya* preparatory course. The six techniques of *Samadhi*, given as a conclusion to a nerve-wracking and boring course, consisted of a variation of the *Hong So* technique, three fairly common visualization techniques, the classic instruction to maintain continuous awareness throughout the day, and finally a variation of the *Om* technique that I had once learned from my first *Kriya* organization.

The variants of the *Hong So* technique, as well as the *Om* technique, seemed conceived by a lazy mind whose only concern in adulterating them was to avoid the accusation of copying from PY's organization, without worrying that the resulting techniques might have lost some of their power. For example, in the first technique the "*Hong-So*" *Mantra* was replaced by "*Om-Babaji*" forgetting that *Hong-So* is a universal *Mantra* whose syllables have been specifically chosen for their power to calm the breath, with which they have a vibrational connection.

The three techniques of visualization were of a kind to what is found in any concentration or meditation book. For many of us who had a lifetime experience with the preliminary *Kriya* techniques offered by the PY organization, receiving such techniques again, somehow disguised and passed off as *Samadhi* techniques, was truly a cold shower.

It was clear that this path was not what I was looking for. My trust in this teacher dropped dramatically especially when he described his hypothetical meeting with *Babaji*. I was amazed hearing the disconcerting platitudes that this *Babaji* would have said him: for example that the one who at the time was the teacher's wife would have done a very good job writing a book of vegetarian recipes.

Of this path I considered interesting only the technique of *Kriya Kundalini Pranayama* of which I appreciated two details in particular. The first concerned the importance of perceiving the energy of sexuality and concentrating on lifting it above the brain and perceiving its transformation that had to be distributed throughout the body during exhalation. The second aspect was that the exhalation was to last twice as long as the exhalation.

The most annoying thing about the recommended routine was that, once the prescribed number of breaths were completed, the process set in motion had to be abruptly abandoned to practice the so-called *Dhyana Kriya*, a meditation technique that no longer concerned the spine and the control of the energy but was based on the visualization of a fantasy chosen

at will. It seemed very stupid to me to go from an exercise that aimed to achieve a certain very beautiful and important goal to an exercise that aimed to achieve something else through the imagination.

There is a principle that is always valid in any form of *Pranayama*: what you have done, or tried to do, by controlling the energy using the breath, you have to carry it out using a more subtle breath and in the end totally abandon awareness of the breath to proceed only with a mental work, always in an attempt to control the energy. This activity normally takes time, at least 10-20 minutes after the main *Pranayama* exercise.

Well after ignoring the various banalities taught by this school, I tried to carry on the practice of *Kriya Pranayama* lengthening the exhalation just as I had been taught. This fact led me to work intensely on guiding the energy linked to the exhalation throughout the body, up to its cells. From this practice originated the interesting discoveries that I have illustrated in chapter 17.

APPENDIX N.4 HOW I APPROACHED THE ORIGINAL FOURTH KRIYA

In these appendices I explain how I came, through various ways, at *Lahiri Mahasaya's* conception of *Kriya* that is described in the second part of the book, in particular in chapters 8 and 9.

Let's start with the *Fourth Kriya* explained in chapter 8. It was taught to me with particular *Mantras* which I now illustrate. The original practice essentially remains the same.

I premise that the *Gayatri Mantra* is considered to be the supreme vehicle for obtaining spiritual enlightenment. Its purest form is *Om Tat Savitur Varenyam Bhargho Devasya Dhimahi Dhiyo Yonaha Prachodayat*. (Oh great Spiritual Light you created the Universe we meditate on Your glory. You are the embodiment of Knowledge. You are the One who eliminates Ignorance. May You enlighten our Intellect and awaken our intuition.)

This *Mantra* is preceded by either a short or a long invocation. The short invocation is: *Om Bhur, Om Bhuvah, Om Swaha*. The terms *Bhur, Bhuvah, Swaha* are invocations to honor the planes of existence (physical, astral and causal) and address the deities who preside over them. The long invocation is: *Om Bhur, Om Bhuvah, Om Swaha, Om Mahah, Om Janah, Om Tapah, Om Satyam*. This invocation is more complete as it recognizes that there are multiple levels of existence: the seven *Lokas*. *Mahah* is the mental world, the level of spiritual balance; *Janah* is the world of pure knowledge; *Tapah* is the world of intuition; *Satyam* is the world of the Absolute, Final Truth. We can be satisfied with the explanation that these are the seven sounds that activate our *Chakras* and put them in contact with the seven great spiritual realms of existence. In this procedure we use the long invocation but not all the components of the *Gayatri Mantra*. In this

tradition we associate *Manipura* with *Om Mahah* and *Anahata* with *Om Swaha*. The reason for this is to be found in the fact that the world of thought, evoked by *Om Mahah* is more suited to the nature of the third *Chakra*, while the causal world of pure ideas, evoked by *Om Swaha*, is related to *Anahata Chakra*.

Practical instruction

Become aware of the *Muladhara Chakra*. Contract the muscles near the physical location of the *Chakra* – the contraction can be repeated two to three times. Through a deep inhalation (not necessarily long as in *Kriya Pranayama*) visualize the *Chakra* rising to the point between the eyebrows, where you perceive it as a full moon. Hold your breath and focus on the "inner space" between the eyebrows. This is easy with *Kechari Mudra*. A particular color experience takes place on the screen between the eyebrows, which is different for each *Chakra*. Mentally chant at least three times the specific *Mantra* for the *Muladhara Chakra*: *Om Bhur*.

Finally, through a long exhalation, ideally lower the *Chakra* from the point between the eyebrows to its seat in the spine. Now you know what to do for each of the other *Chakras*.

The *Mantras* that are used are: *Om Bhur* for *Muladhara*, *Om Bhuvah* for *Swadhisthana*, *Om Mahah* for *Manipura*, *Om Swaha* for *Anahata*, *Om Janah* for *Vishuddha*, *Om Tapah* for *Medulla*.

Add a particularly intense focus at the point between the eyebrows. Hold your breath; raise your eyebrows, become aware of the Light. Repeat *Om Satyam*.

Now complete the "round" by lifting the *Chakras* 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, always using the contraction, the chanting of the *Mantra*, the becoming aware of any experience of Light in *Kutastha*. If possible, repeat the procedure 6 to 12 times.

In the *Kriya* tradition, the first five *Chakras* are each related to one of the five *Tattwas*: earth, water, fire, air, and ether. As we have explained above, offering each *Chakra* and therefore each *Tattwa* individually to the Divine Light that collects and intensifies in the region between the eyebrows is the definitive action to dissolve the last shell of the illusion.

APPENDIX N.5 HOW I APPROACHED THE ORIGINAL FIFTH KRIYA

I have been wondering for a long time if there was a form of *Thokar* that also acted on the first three *Chakras*, in particular on *Muladhara*.

In fact, I remember that the "Meditation counselor" who helped us to master PY's teachings had revealed to us that PY had actually taught an undefined procedure that acted on this *Chakra*, but had only revealed it to six advanced disciples as this technique was not intended for widespread

diffusion. She added that other researchers who had learned of this procedure from other sources had found it difficult to take and to metabolize its power.

Years later I found myself discussing this hypothetical technique with a French researcher who had on his own decided to try the experiment of applying *Thokar* also on *Muladhara*: he seemed highly satisfied with the results. He described his practice to me with great emotion.

I then decided to try this experiment which I am now going to describe. For a long time I used this practice at the beginning of my *Kriya* routine with the aim of awakening awareness of the entire spine. I hope that the reader understands how important it is to raise the consciousness with various deep and long inhalations after this procedure – it is also for this reason that I always practiced it before *Kriya Pranayama*.

Practical teaching

Squeeze the muscles at the base of the spine moderately. The chin is lowered to the chest. Inhale and at the same time lift awareness up the spinal column.

The hands (with fingers interlocked) are placed over the navel area to create mental pressure on the first three *Chakras*. This pressure is perfected by adding the practice of *Uddiyana Bandha*.

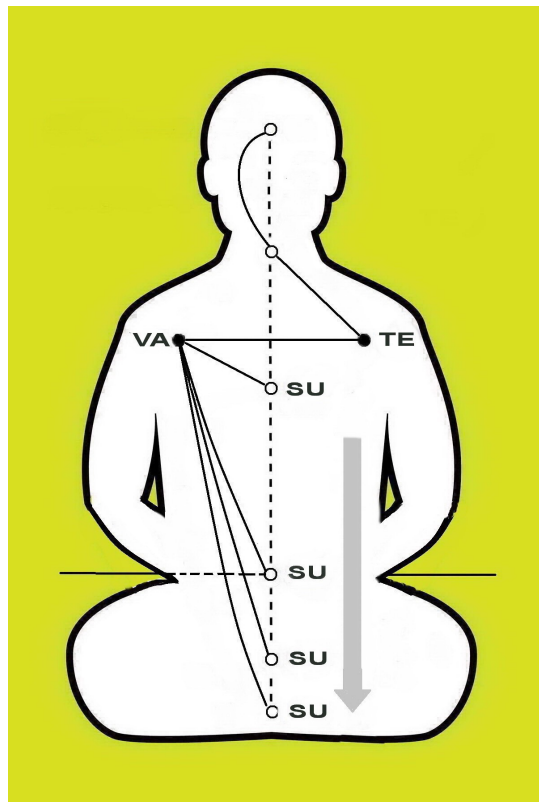


Fig.21 Thokar with stimulation to the lower Chakras
The person is seen from behind

During the inhalation, lift the chin following the internal movement of the *Prana*; mentally chant the syllables of the *Vasudeva Mantra*. The syllable "Om" is placed in the first *Chakra*, "Na" in the second, "Mo" in the third, "Bha" in the fourth, "Ga" in the fifth and "Ba" in the *Medulla*. Hold your breath.

Move your head a few millimeters to the left, then return to center with your chin slightly up. Without stopping, turn your face to the right. The chin drops a little to get closer to the front of the right shoulder. There is no stress in this movement.

Mentally chant "Tee" into the upper right lung. Then slowly move the head into the symmetrical position by mentally placing "Va" at the top of the left lung. Still holding the breath, lower the chin on the center of the chest by mentally vibrating the syllable "Su" in the heart *Chakra*. While striking this *Chakra* practice *Mula Bandha* for a couple of seconds.

After placing the syllable "Su" in the heart *Chakra*, instead of exhaling, continue to hold your breath. Repeat the movements of the head that we have explained, those connected with the mental chanting of the syllables "Tee" and "Va" and then lower the chin on the center of the chest concentrating on the third *Chakra* and making the same syllable "Su" vibrate in it. In the same way strike the second *Chakra* with the syllable "Su" and in the same way strike the first *Chakra* with the syllable "Su". Stay for a few moments with the concentration fixed in the *Muladhara* repeating very slowly "De", "Va", "Ya" and then exhale. Take a short full breath followed by a very slow inhalation. Repeat the practice at least 6 times.

Finally inhale very, very slowly, feeling that you are actually entering the spine. Proceed with great delicacy and sensitivity. You will find that you can very easily guide the movement of energy upward within the spine.

It is possible that you feel that your energy does not reach your head right away. Don't worry. Repeat this inhalation several times and each time try to experience the raising of the energy. You should be able to feel a very gentle current moving up the spine.

In my experience the effects of this practice were always positive. This practice was later replaced by the procedure called *Thokar Tribhangamurari* – which, in the tradition of *Panchanan Bhattacharya*, is called the *Fifth Kriya*. This splendid technique requires a long preparation, an intense practice but it does not create any problems, on the contrary it fills those who practice it with bliss. The full explanation of this technique can be found in chapter 9.

APPENDIX N.6 FOUR PRACTICES THAT MAY BE USEFUL

[1] *Consummation of Thokar*

The practice of *Thokar* can end with a beautiful procedure, explained by an Indian Master, very effective for intensifying the consciousness in the region of the fourth *Chakra*.

This procedure makes use of *Bhramari Pranayama*. It consists of exhaling slowly through the nose producing a long continuous buzzing sound like that of a bumblebee. This sound reverberates in the head. The relaxing power of this form of *Pranayama* is remarkable.

Use the *Bhramari* exhalation as follows: inhale, bow your head a little forward and start a long *Bhramari* exhalation. As you exhale, slowly guide the vibration into the heart center. This *Bhramari* exhalation should last at least 20 seconds. As you lower your chin very slowly, continuously increase the intensity of this sound until your chin approaches the sternum clearly and strongly, in this way you practice one *Thokar*. At this moment the volume of the sound becomes almost explosive. After this *Thokar*, stay with you breath out until it creates discomfort. Feel a strong energy that intensifies in the heart and expands in all directions. The most important sign of good performance is the appearance of inner silence – a firm awareness of inner bliss – eternal peace that becomes stable in the nervous system. It is impossible to think a single thought. It has been explained that it is by immersing yourself in this state that the heart knot can be pierced and the door of the *Sushumna* revealed. Without this final subtle perception, something very precious is lost.

[2] *9 Fold Breath Meditation*

In Appendix 1 I introduced the *Tummo* technique preceded by the identification of the center of our body which in the *Inner Alchemy* of ancient China is called *Dantian*.

If a person is interested in practicing this technique, the exercise I describe here can prove to be decisive for perceiving well in the *Dantian* center.

In the typical position of meditation, visualize the body as transparent, as if it were made of crystal.

The *Sushumna* canal is like a tube with a diameter of about two centimeters. Attention: it starts from a point that is four centimeters below the navel (therefore it is the point we call *Dantian*) and reaches the top of the head.

To the right and left of the central channel, there are two thinner channels that start from the nostrils and descend, parallel to the central

channel and reach up to the *Dantian*. Indeed, to be precise, they descend parallel to the *Sushumna* and then, at the height of the *Dantian*, curve towards the center like two umbrella handles reaching the *Dantian*. Thus they join the central channel.

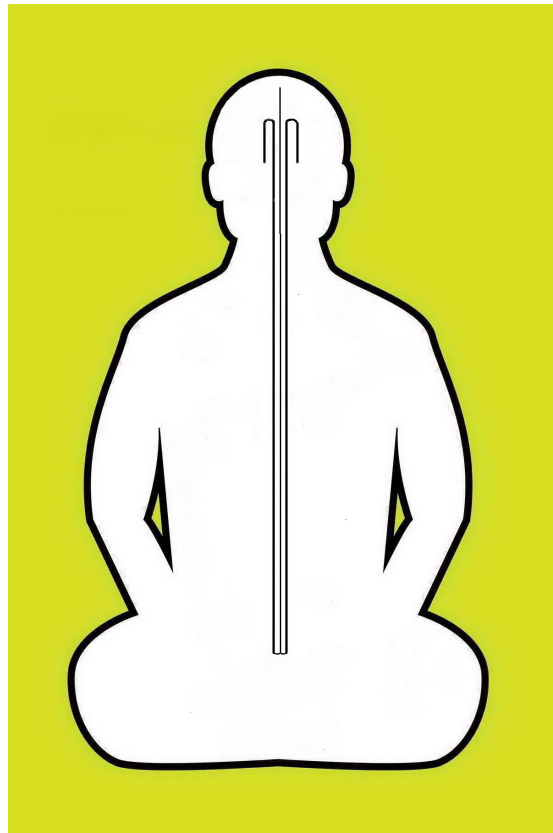


Fig.22 9 Fold Breath Meditation

This exercise looks like *Nadi Sodhana Pranayama* but is a little different. Close the left nostril. Inhale through the right nostril, feel the energy flowing down to the *Dantian*. Hold your breath for a few seconds, plug the right nostril, expel the air by making it rise through the left channel and exit through the left nostril.

By doing this, imagine that through the right nostril a clean and fresh energy enters which descends along the right channel and arrives, curving towards the center, at the *Dantian* point. After a pause, during the exhalation, imagine that you are throwing out impurities through the current that rises up the left channel and exits through the left nostril.

Repeat this exercise three times, then repeat the previous three steps reversing the role of the nostrils. It simply switches right to left and vice versa.

Finally, place your hands in your lap, imagine breathing in light and energy from both nostrils. Light and energy descend as you inhale and merge into the *Dantian*. Hold the air for a few seconds.

A new energy current is manifesting. Exhale through the *Dantian*: a

spiritual light enters the central channel of the spine and begins to rise. The exhalation is calm and long. You feel the energy rising and you particularly feel the moment it passes through the heart area. It rises up to the head and comes out high, radiating into infinite space. Repeat this last step 3 times.

You have practiced 3 + 3 + 3 breaths. You may decide to repeat this practice three times. The effect will be more intense.

[3] *Kapalabhati*

Try practicing this breathing exercise before *Kriya*.

Quickly inhale and exhale; the exhalation should be done by contracting the abdominal muscles strongly and rapidly, and this results in a push back. Breathing occurs through the nose. The most important thing to remember is that the inhalation is passive: as soon as the air is pushed out, the abdominal muscles are relaxed and the inhalation occurs automatically. Exhalation and inhalation alternate with the same length and occur approximately twice per second. The navel acts like a pump, as if the abdomen were used as a bellows. The sound is a bit like blowing your nose after cleaning it. During each expulsion the *Prana* is directed towards the navel. After 15-20 such short exhalations, there is a pause and the breathing resumes its normal rhythm. Then practice two more cycles of 15-20 short breaths.

[4] *Nauli*

This is a practice that involves physical exercise. It collaborates with the awakening of *Kundalini*.

Practice standing with your feet a little more than shoulder distance apart with your knees slightly bent, and bending forward enough to rest your hands on your knees. Expel all the air from your lungs through your mouth (huhh huhh.) Hold your breath but just make the motion you would inhale by pulling the abdominal muscles back towards your back.

Keep the breath out as much as possible by pressing on your knees with both arms. The abdomen remains drawn towards the chest. Then inhale and breathe freely. This is when you should do it for three to four weeks.

Then try to practice the second stage. Holding the breath with the abdomen drawn towards the chest, focus on an ideal point behind the navel, inside the body visualizing a hand pushing the muscles outwards. With your eyes closed, insist until your abdominal muscles move forward. Exhale, relax and repeat. That's all you should be doing for a couple of weeks.

During the third stage, when you are with the breath out and the abdomen in, you only contract the right side of the abdomen. This is

possible if you increase the pressure of the hand above the right knee. Exhale, relax and repeat by contracting the left side of the abdomen.

The last stage consists in contracting the right side of the abdominal muscles and then the left side without pausing in between, with the breath out. You will get a rotational motion. You will create in those looking at you the illusion that the muscles move from side to side in a circular fashion. It will appear that you are turning your abdominal muscles while you are only contracting the right, center, left, center and so on. Do at least twenty rotations. Then a pause, then a couple of deep breaths, exhale again and continue with the rotations. You will thus have mastered the practice of *Nauli*. No stage of this practice is reached automatically but only with the practice repeated many times.

APPENDIX N.7 USE OF THE 50 LETTERS OF THE SANSKRIT ALPHABET IN THE SECOND KRIYA OF SWAMI HARIHARANANDA

Swami Hariharananda made the decision to teach a typical Tantric *Yoga* practice to enrich his *Second Kriya* practice just before the *Jyoti Mudra*. This technique is called *Nyasa* ("placing" or "touching"), a Tantric ritual that involves a series of touches to specific points on the body. Different *Mantras* are "placed" on different parts of the body. This ritual is believed to make the individual's body more divine.

Later he changed his mind and never taught it again, at least here in Europe. In my opinion it is interesting to describe this procedure.

In each Chakra

The 50 letters of the *Sanskrit* alphabet will be chanted mentally by visualizing the petals of each *Chakra*. There is no breath control. It begins with *Hang Kshang* in *Ajna Chakra*: *Hang* in the left brain and *Kshang* in the right. Then mentally chant the 16 vowels in the cervical *Chakra* (*Ang Aang Ing Iing Ung Uung Ring Rring Lring Lling Eng Aing Ong Oung Aung Ah*) – chant each letter only once and this also applies to the following *Chakras*. In this practice visualize each *Chakra* as a vertical disk that radiates divine Light through its petals. View the number of petals which is predicted by the *Yoga* tradition and view them in clockwise directions. Then put the first 12 consonants in the heart *Chakra* (*Kong Khong Gong Ghong Wong Chong Chhong Jong Jhong Neong Tong Thong*), chant the following 10 in *Manipura* (*Dong Dhong Nong Tong Thong Dong Dhong Noing Pong Phong*), then the following 6 in *Swadhistan* (*Bong Bhong Mong Jong Rong Long*) and finally the last 4 in *Muladhara* (*Vong Shhong Shong Song*). In each *Chakra*, start from the upper left, then go down to the left and go up from the right. Three rounds are recommended. Close by repeating the two syllables *Hang Kshang* in *Ajna*.

In the crown of the head

The 50 letters of the *Sanskrit* alphabet are rotated around the crown of the head activating the *Omkar* sound which is perceived in the center of the brain – in the so-called "Cave of Brahma", the seat of the *Pituitary* and *Pineal glands*. We start from behind the crown with the vowels, then continue with the consonants until we return to the starting point. Go around counterclockwise (when viewed from above) and then repeat clockwise. It is recommended to do twelve couple of rotations (6 + 6.)

The good effects of this procedure are easily experienced and that is why this procedure is perceived as "providential."

In different parts of the body

The 50 letters of the *Sanskrit* alphabet are placed in the 50 parts of the body where the human body [according to the tantric tradition] can be divided. There is no breath control. Place your hand on the following parts of the body, mentally chanting the appropriate letter.

1 ANG Forehead 2 AANG Mouth 3 ING Left eye 4 IING Right eye 5 UNG Left ear 6 UUNG Right ear 7 RING Left nostril 8 RRING Right nostril 9 LRING Left cheek 10 LLRING Right cheek 11 ENG inner part of the mouth (here you must not touch) 12 AING Chin 13 NGO Upper lip and upper teeth 14 OUNG Lower lip and lower teeth 15 AUNG Forehead & tops of head 16 AH Full face (touch with both hands) 17 KONG Left shoulder 18 KHONG Left elbow 19 GONG Left wrist 20 GHONG Left finger knuckles 21 WONG Left finger joints 22 CHONG right shoulder 23 CHHONG Right elbow 24 JONG Right wrist 25 JHONG Right finger knuckles 26 NEONG Right finger joints 27 TONG Left thigh joint 28 THONG Left knee 29 DONG Left ankle 30 DHONG Forefoot left 31 NONG Left toes 32 TONG Right thigh joint 33 THONG Right knee 34 DONG Right ankle 35 DHONG Right forefoot 36 NOING Right toes 37 PONG Left ribs 38 PHONG Right ribs 39 BONG Back (touch up and down) 40 BHONG Lower abdomen 41 MONG Upper abdomen 42 JONG Heart center 43 RONG Left shoulder 44 LONG Back of neck 45 VONG Right shoulder 46 SHHONG From left shoulder to right hand 47 SHONG From right shoulder to left hand 48 SONG From left shoulder to right foot 49 HAM Right shoulder to left foot 50 AKSHAM Moving down the front of the body

GLOSSARY

This glossary is for those who already know the meaning of the most common terms used in Kriya but prefer not to be uncertain about how they are used in this book.

Apana It is one of the five forms of energy in the body. Associated with the lower abdomen region, it is responsible for all activities (elimination process for example) that take place there. Kriya Pranayama, in its initial phase, is essentially the movement of Prana (the particular energy present in the upper part of the trunk – lungs and heart) in Apana and of Apana in Prana. When we inhale, the energy from the outside of the body is brought in and meets Apana in the lower abdomen; during the exhalation the Apana moves from its seat upwards and mixes with the Prana. The continuous repetition of this event generates an increase of heat in the navel region.

Asana Body position suitable for meditation. According to Patanjali, the position taken by the Yogi must be stable and comfortable. Most kriyabans get along well with the so-called Half-lotus [see]: it avoids some physical problems. For the average kriyaban, Siddhasana [see] is considered superior to all other Asanas. The perfect Padmasana position is not recommended [see].

Aswini Mudra The definition is: repeatedly contract the muscles at the base of the spine [sphincter] with the rhythm of approximately two contractions per second. "Ashwa" means "mare"; "Aswini Mudra" means "Mudra of the mare" because the anal contraction resembles the movement she makes with her sphincter immediately after bowel evacuation. There may be slightly different definitions of such a Mudra and, sometimes, it is confused with the Mula Bandha [see]. This Mudra is a direct way to get in touch with the blocked and stagnant energy at the base of the spine and continuously push it upwards.

Bandha Bandhas are energy valves, locks that act on the body's energy system. They prevent the Prana from being dissipated and direct it inside the spine. No practice of Pranayama can be said to be complete and correct without the Bandhas. [See Jalandhara Bandha, Uddiyana Bandha and Mula Bandha]

Bhrumadhya The space between the eyebrows, connected with Ajna Chakra. It is also called the 'third eye' or Kutastha.

Bindu It is a spiritual center located at the back of the head where the hairline forms a kind of vortex. (This is the Sikha point where Hindus, with shaved heads, keep a lock of hair.) It is not considered a Chakra in and of itself. However it is very important because it functions as a door that leads awareness to the Sahasrara – the seventh Chakra located at the top of the head. As long as

the energy, diffused throughout the body, does not reach the Bindu, a kind of screen prevents the yogi from contemplating the Spiritual Eye. Bringing all one's strength there, in that small space, is not an easy task because the roots of the Ego have their seat in this center; they must be faced and eradicated.

Breathlessness This state has nothing to do with forcibly holding your breath. It does not consist in the trivial fact that the breath becomes more and more calm. Instead we refer to the state in which the breath is completely absent, with the consequent dissolution of the mind. See also the entry: Kumbhaka

Chakra The word Chakra comes from the Sanskrit cakra which means "wheel" or "circle." The Chakras are the "wheels" of our spiritual life; they are described in the tantric texts as emanations of the Spirit, whose essence gradually expanded into ever coarser levels of manifestation, eventually reaching the dimension of the base Chakra, Muladhara, which represents the physical world. The energy-consciousness, descended, lies coiled and asleep at the base of the spine and is called, Kundalini – she who is coiled. We human beings consider as real only the physical world: it is only when our Kundalini awakens that we regain full memory of the reality of the subtle dimension of the Universe.

No author has ever "proved" the existence of the Chakras – as no man has ever proved the existence of the soul. Since we cannot bring them to a laboratory table it is difficult to describe them. In any book of Yoga we find descriptions based on a translation of two Indian texts, the Sat-Cakra-Nirupana, and the Padaka-Pancaka, written by Sir John Woodroffe, alias Arturo Avalon in a book entitled "The power of the Serpent." The argument that is described there seems to be unnaturally complicated, almost impossible to use.

These concepts have been further polluted by theosophy and similar esoteric literature. The book "The Chakras" written by controversial author C. W. Leadbeater, is largely the result of the mental processing of this author.

Through the practice of Kriya, we can experience the Chakras.

Located above the anus, right at the base of the spinal column, in the lowest part of the coccyx, we meet the **Muladhara** root Chakra, a center that distributes energy to the legs, to the lowest part of the pelvis, particularly radiating the Gonads (testicles in the men, ovaries in women). Muladhara symbolizes objective consciousness, awareness of the physical universe. It is placed in relation to instinct, security, our ability to take root in the physical world, the desire for material goods and also to build a good self image. If this Chakra is in a harmonious state, we are well centered and have a strong will to live.

The second Chakra **Swadhisthana** is located in the spine between the last lumbar vertebrae and the beginning of the sacrum. Its energetic projection area is said to be the area of the sexual organs – in part it intersects the Muladhara region of influence. Because it is related to basic emotions, sexual vitality, creativity, and the deepest part of the subconscious realms, a deep urge to that center will produce very engaging deep dreams; his action can be perceived as a feeling of living a fairy tale, sweet and tempting.

The third Chakra **Manipura** is located in the spine at the same level as the navel, near the end of the dorsal vertebrae and the beginning of the lumbar vertebrae. It is claimed to affect the pancreas and adrenal glands above the kidneys. This link suggested the idea that this Chakra has the same role played by these glands: strong emotions and energy recharge – just like the effects of adrenaline. It is said to help create a sense of personal power, a sure feeling of "I am". Grounded and at ease in our place in the universe, we are capable of steadfastly affirming our life's purpose.

The fourth Chakra **Anahata**, the heart Chakra, is located in the spine at the height of the middle part of the dorsal vertebrae. It affects the thymus which is part of the immune system. Everyone agrees that Anahata is connected with the highest emotions, compassion, love, and intuition. When a person focuses on it, feelings of deep tenderness and compassion will begin to develop. A healthy and completely open Heart Chakra means being able to see the internal beauty in others despite their apparent defects, loving everyone, even strangers. There is a gradual progression from the "good emotions" of the lower Chakras to the higher emotions and feelings of the heart Chakra. What is of great interest is that opening up this center involves seeing life in a more neutral way and seeing what others cannot see. Cease the predisposition to be influenced by other people, by churches and by organizations in general.

The fifth **Vishuddha** Chakra, the Throat Chakra, is located between the last cervical vertebrae and the first dorsal vertebrae, influencing the Thyroid and Parathyroid glands; since it also controls the activity of the vocal cords, it is claimed that it has something to do with our ability to express our ideas in the world. It seems that it can be related to the ability to communicate and to take personal responsibility for our actions. The person no longer blames others for his problems and can carry on his life with full responsibility. Many authors claim that it awakens artistic inspiration, the ability to develop a superior aesthetic perception.

The sixth Chakra **Ajna**, third eye, is located in the central part of the brain. It affects the pituitary gland [pituitary] and the cerebellum. The pituitary gland plays a vital role in the body, in the sense that together with the hypothalamus it acts as a control system for all the other endocrine glands. In Sanskrit, "Ajna" means "to command," which means that it has the command or controls our lives: by means of a controlled action, it brings the fruit of our desires to reality. Consequently, it is claimed that the Ajna Chakra plays a vital role in a person's spiritual awakening. It is the seat of intuition.

The seventh Chakra is the **Sahasrara**, which extends from the crown of the head up to the fontanel and above it. It cannot be considered of the same nature as others but a higher reality that can only be experienced in the breathless state. It is claimed that it affects, or is related to, the Pineal gland. It is therefore not as easy to focus on it as we do with others. It is a higher reality and we can "tune into" it by using the **Bindu** [see] as a gateway.

Teachings concerning the "**Frontal Chakras**" are given by some Kriya masters.

The perineum is the first, the genital region is the second, the navel is the third, the central part of the sternum region is the fourth, the Adam's apple is the fifth, and the point between the eyebrows can be considered the sixth. The key point is to understand that when these points are touched with concentration, the energy around the corresponding Chakra in the spine is stimulated.

Dharana According to Patanjali, Dharana is concentration on a physical or abstract object. In Kriya, Dharana consists in making our attention converge towards the revelation of the Spirit: the inner sound of Omkar, light or sensation of movement. This happens immediately after you have calmed your breath.

Dhyana According to Patanjali, Dhyana arises from contemplating the essential nature of the chosen object, as a constant, uninterrupted stream of consciousness. In Kriya the awareness, dwelling on the Omkar reality, soon plunges into the state of Samadhi.

Flute sound (during Kriya Pranayama)

During the exhalation of Kriya Pranayama, a slight hiss is produced in the throat; when a kriyaban succeeds in assuming the position of Kechari Mudra, then the frequency of the sound of the exhalation increases. This sound has been likened to "Krishna's flute." Lahiri Mahasaya describes it: "like when someone blows through a keyhole". This extremely enjoyable sound causes the mind to grow in calm and transparency and helps to effortlessly prolong the practice of Kriya Pranayama. One day the sound of the flute changes into the sound of Om. In other words, it gives rise to the sound of Om, the vibration of which is so strong that it covers the very sound of the flute. During this event, a strong movement of energy rises up the spine.

Granthi It means knot. The traditional definition of the Granthi identifies three knots: the Brahma Granthi at the Muladhara Chakra; the Vishnu Granthi in the heart Chakra and the Rudra Granthi point between the eyebrows. These are the places where the Nadi Ida, Pingala and Sushumna come together.

Lahiri Mahasaya stresses the importance of overcoming two further obstacles: tongue and navel which are dissolved by Kechari Mudra and Navi Kriya, respectively. The knot of the tongue separates us from the reservoir of energy found in the Sahasrara region. The navel knot originates from the trauma of cutting the umbilical cord.

Guru The importance of finding a Guru (teacher) to supervise the spiritual training of the disciple is one of the core beliefs of many spiritual paths. A Guru is a teacher, a guide and so much more. The holy scriptures declare that the Guru is God and God is the Guru. We are used to explaining the term "Guru" as a metaphorical interaction between darkness and light: the Guru is seen as the one who dispels the darkness: "Gu" means darkness and "Ru" the one who removes it. Some scholars do not accept this etymology; according to them "Gu" stands

for "beyond quality" and "Ru" for "formless". To receive all the benefits of contact with the Guru one must be humble, sincere, pure in body and mind and ready to surrender to the will and instructions of the Guru. Usually, during initiation (Diksha) a Guru transmits esoteric knowledge to the disciple so that he can advance along the path to self-realization. The inner phenomenon of Shaktipat takes place: the spiritual realization that lies dormant within the disciple is awakened.

The organizations that spread Kriya do not insist on the concept of Shaktipat but accept everything else. Lahiri Mahasaya's thinking seems to take us in a markedly different direction. One day he said, "I am not the Guru, I do not keep a barrier between the true Guru (the Divine) and the disciple." He added that he wanted to be regarded as a "mirror". In other words, each kriyaban would have to look to Him not as an unattainable ideal, but as the personification of all the wisdom and spiritual realization that, in due time, the practice of Kriya would be able to bring out.

Now the question arises: do Kriya techniques work outside the Guru-disciple relationship? We can certainly use both faith and reason in this area. Many kriyabans are confident that they can transform techniques, no matter how received, into "gold". They think: "Even if I can't find a real Guru, a Kriya expert, at my disposal, I roll up my sleeves and go ahead with the material that I have been able to find so far!" So these kriyabans believe that Kriya techniques also work outside of this Guru-disciple relationship.

Half-lotus This Asana has been used for meditation since time immemorial because it is very comfortable. The left leg is bent and brought towards the body and the sole of the left foot rests on the inner part of the right thigh. The heel of the left foot is pulled as close to the body as possible. The right leg is bent and the right foot is placed over the crease area of the left leg. The right knee is brought as close to the floor as possible. The hands rest on the knees. The secret is to keep the spine erect: this can only be achieved by sitting on a pillow, quite thick, with the buttocks resting towards the front half of the pillow. In this way the buttocks are slightly raised, while the knees are level with the floor. When the legs get tired, the position is prolonged by reversing the legs. In certain situations, it may be providential to take this Half-lotus on a chair, as long as the chair has no armrests and is wide enough. In this way one can lower one leg to the floor and relax the knee joint! Some Yoga teachers explain that the pressure of a tennis ball (or a folded towel) on the perineum can give the benefits of the Siddhasana position.

Ida [see Nadi]

Inner Alchemy [Taoist - Nei Dan] It is the mystical tradition of ancient China. It recalls the techniques of the First Level of Kriya Yoga with such accuracy that it offers us all the reasons to believe that it consists of the same process. I summarize this movement in chapter 12.

Jalandhara Bandha In Jalandhara Bandha the neck and throat are slightly contracted, while the chin is pressed against the chest.

Japa Means Prayer. Prayer is an invocation that allows a person to offer his reverent plea or offer his praise to the Divine. The sequence of words used in the Prayer can be a fixed formula or a spontaneous expression. Whatever the appeal to God, this act presupposes faith in the Divine Will to interfere in our life: "Ask and it will be given to you" (Matt. 7: 7, 8; 21:22) Prayer is a very vast subject; here I will limit myself to the repetitive Prayer. In India, the repetition of the Name of the Divine is called Japa. This word comes from the root Jap - which means "to speak in a low voice, to repeat inwardly". Japa also means repeating any Mantra: this is a broader term than Prayer. A Mantra can be a name of the Divine but also a pure sound without a precise meaning. In ancient times yogis felt the power inherent in certain sounds and used them extensively. (Some believe that the repetition of a Mantra has the mysterious power to produce the manifestation of Divinity, "just as the breaking of an atom manifests the tremendous forces latent in it.") The term Mantra derives from the words "Manas" (mind) and "Tra" (protection): We protect our mind by repeating the same healthy vibration over and over.

Usually a Mantra is repeated verbally for a certain number of times, then it is whispered and then, for a while, it is repeated mentally. Almost always, Japa is done by counting Mantras by means of a string of beads known as Japa Mala. The number of such beads is normally 108 or 100. Mala is used so that the devotee is free to enjoy the practice and does not worry about counting repetitions. It can be practiced while sitting in a meditation position or doing other activities, preferably walking.

Kechari Mudra The position of the tongue called Kechari Mudra is obtained in one of the following two ways:

- [a] By putting the tongue in contact with the uvula at the back of the soft palate.
- [b] Inserting the tongue into the nasal pharynx, touching, if possible, the nasal septum.

According to Lahiri Mahasaya, a kriyaban should realize this Mudra not by cutting the frenulum of the tongue but by means of Talabya Kriya [see]. Kechari literally translates as: "the state of those who fly in the sky, in the ether", in the "inner space". Kechari is likened to bypassing the energy system of the mind. It changes the path of the flow of Prana causing the life force to be withdrawn from the thinking process. Instead of allowing thoughts to leap like frogs here and there, let the mind be quiet and focus on the goal of meditation. We do not realize the amount of energy we dissipate when we are lost in our thoughts, in our plans. Kechari transforms this pernicious way of consuming all our vitality into its opposite. The mind begins to lose its despotic role: the "inner activity" no longer occurs through the thinking process but through the development of the intuition. Combined with Kriya it is a substantial aid in clarifying one's complex psychological structures. One topic of debate is the

experience of the elixir of life, "Amrita", the "Nectar." It is a sweet tasting fluid perceived by the kriyaban with the tip of the tongue when it touches the uvula or the bony prominence, in the roof of the palate, under the pituitary gland. The Yoga tradition explains that there is a Nadi flowing through the center of the tongue; of the energy radiates through its tip and when it touches that bony prominence, its radiation arrives and stimulates the Ajna Chakra in the center of the brain.

Kevala Kumbhaka [see Breathlessness]

Kriya Yoga If we want to understand the essence of Kriya Yoga, it is necessary to put aside some definitions. Kriya is broader than these definitions suggest. Patanjali used the term Kriya Yoga only once: "Kriya Yoga is made up of physical discipline, mind control, and meditation on Iswara." [Yoga Sutras II: 1] This is undoubtedly correct, but following the evolution of his thought we are led astray.

Although he claims that by remembering the inner sound of Om we can achieve the removal of all obstacles that normally block our spiritual evolution, he does not develop this method. It is far from describing the same spiritual discipline taught by Lahiri Mahasaya.

Kriya is a "mystical path" that uses the best tools used by mystics of all religions. It consists of breath control [Pranayama], Prayer [Japa] and the pure effort to tune into the Omkar Reality. The calming process of the breath, followed by the Thokar procedure, guides the energy of the body into the heart Chakra, thus stopping the incessant reflex that gives rise to the breath. When perfect calm is established, when all internal and external movements cease, the kriyaban perceives an irradiation of fresh energy that sustains each cell from within; then the breathless state becomes stable. When the physical breath is totally transcended and the circulation of a subtle form of energy occurs in the body – it is said that the breath is "Internalized" – a sense of infinite security, solidity and trust is born. The sensation is that of having crossed a barrier and having entered an immense space: Kriya Yoga is a miracle of beauty.

Kumbhaka Kumbhaka means to hold your breath. It is a phase of Pranayama, so important that some Yoga teachers doubt whether a breathing exercise that does not include any Kumbhaka can be correctly considered Pranayama. It is observed that when we are about to do something that requires our full attention, or at least requires a lot of it, our breath is automatically held. This shows how natural this is. The inspiration in Pranayama is called Puraka or "the act of filling"; the exhalation is called Rechaka, or "the act of emptying." The holding of the breath is called Kumbhaka, or "holding." Kumbha is a pitcher: just as a pitcher holds water, so in Kumbhaka the breath and Prana are held in the body.

In the classical literature on Yoga there are four types of Kumbhaka described.

I. Exhale deeply and hold the breath for a few seconds. This is known as "Bahir Kumbhaka" (External Kumbhaka).

II. The second, "Antar Kumbhaka" (Inner Kumbhaka), is holding your breath after a deep inhalation. Usually this type of Kumbhaka is accompanied by the performance of the three Bandhas.

III. The third type is that practiced during alternate breathing – inhale deeply through the left nostril, then hold the breath and exhale through the right.... It is considered to be the easiest form of Kumbhaka.

IV. The fourth is the most important of all, the peak of Pranayama. It is called Kevala Kumbhaka or automatic suspension of breath: it is the state of breathlessness where there is no inhalation or exhalation, and not even the slightest desire to breathe.

In the practice of Kriya the fundamental principle of (I.) is present in all those procedures that involve a series of very long and calm exhalations that seem to end in a very sweet nothing.

The internal Kumbhaka (II.) We find it in different techniques of Kriya; especially in Yoni Mudra, Maha Mudra and Thokar.

Maha Mudra, with its balancing action on the right side and on the left side of the spine, also contains – in a broad sense – the principles of (III.): Alternating breathing.

A turning point in Kriya is the attainment of (IV.) Kevala Kumbhaka.

Kundalini Kundalini is a Sanskrit term for "coiled": it is conceived as a particular energy wrapped like a snake in the Muladhara Chakra. The image of being rolled up like a spring gives the idea of potential energy, still intact. It sleeps in our bodies, under the layers of our consciousness, waiting to be awakened through both spiritual discipline and other means – such as particular life experiences. It is said that it rises from Muladhara through the Sushumna spinal canal, activating each Chakra as it proceeds; when it arrives at the Sahasrara Chakra at the top of the head, it grants infinite bliss, mystical enlightenment etc. It is only through repeated Kundalini raises that the yogi succeeds in achieving Self-realization.

The concept of Kundalini and, in particular, of its awakening, offers a convenient framework for expressing what happens on the spiritual path. Most spiritual traditions show that they have some awareness of Kundalini; not all are equally open in explaining the practical details of this process.

The awakening of Kundalini does not consist of pleasant sensations such as a mild sense of the flow of energy in the spine. The movement of Kundalini is like having an internal "volcanic eruption", a "rocket" shot through our spine! Its nature is beneficial; there are obvious reasons for perplexity in considering Kundalini awakening reports accompanied by problems such as clearly disturbed breathing patterns, distortion of thought processes, unusual or extreme emotional enhancements to be authentic ... We are rather inclined to think that some latent disease, revealed openly by the reckless practice of violent exercises or drugs is the cause of those phenomena. Phenomena such as insomnia, hypersensitivity to

the environment can actually follow the authentic experience. In a "true awakening" the Kundalini force completely eclipses the ego and the person feels disoriented for a time. But everything is absorbed without problems. Unfortunately, the search for the repetition of the episode can lead to the disordered and imprudent practice of bizarre techniques, without ever establishing a minimum foundation of mental silence. Each book warns against the risk of premature Kundalini awakening and states that the body must be prepared for that event. Most yogis think they are capable of sustaining this premature awakening, and the warning of danger excites them more than ever: the problem is that many do not have (or have lost) a genuine spiritual approach and harbor a rather egotistical one.

In Kriya we consider Kundalini as the same energy that exists everywhere in the body and not particularly in the Muladhara Chakra. In Kriya we rarely use the term "Kundalini awakening" and we try to avoid what could give the impression that this experience has an alien nature: Kundalini is our energy, it is the purest layer of our consciousness.

Kutastha The "third eye" or "spiritual eye" is the organ of inner vision (the unified astral component of the two physical eyes), the place in the body where the spiritual Light manifests itself. Concentrating between the eyebrows, we first perceive a shapeless darkness, then a small twilight, then other lights; finally we have the experience of a golden ring surrounding a dark spot with a bright point inside it.

There is a connection between Kutastha and Muladhara: what we see in the space between the eyebrows is none other than the opening of the spinal door, which has its seat in the first Chakra. Some teachers affirm that the condition for entering the supreme stage of Kriya is that the vision of the spiritual eye is constant; others identify this state with the condition in which the energy is perfectly calm at the base of the spine. The two statements are equivalent.

Maha Mudra It is a particular stretching position of the body. The importance of this technique becomes clear as soon as it is thought that it incorporates the three main Bandhas of Hatha Yoga. There are truly a thousand and one reasons to firmly practice Maha Mudra. There is a relationship between the number of its repetitions and the number of breaths: it is recommended that for each group of 12 Kriya Pranayama, one Maha Mudra is performed.

Mahasamadhi It is the conscious exit from the body at the time of death. It appears that using the Second Kriya technique, Swami Pranabananda, an eminent disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya, consciously abandoned his body. There was no violence to the body; the feat was only successful at the precise moment determined by his Karma. Now the question arises: what procedure did he use?

a ... Many claim that it was the basic form of Thokar. It is possible that he stopped the movement of the heart and therefore was able to leave the body. He may have practiced a single Thokar and stopped the heart; this means that he put

so much mental strength into this act that he blocked the energy that kept his heart in motion.

b ... Some believe that this supreme action of stilling the heart was only achieved by a mental act of immersion in the point between the eyebrows, entering the light of Kutastha. They say that those around him did not notice any head movements. Similarly, when other great saints left their bodies, no movement was observed.

c ... In my opinion, since Mahasamadhi is not a "shrewd esoteric trick" to master the mechanism of a painless suicide, certainly each great teacher has an already built ability to enter Samadhi. By creating total peace in his being, the natural desire to regain union with the Infinite Source sets in motion a natural mechanism to calm the cardiac plexus.

Mantra [see Japa]

Mental Pranayama In mental Pranayama, kriyaban controls the energy in the body by forgetting the breathing process and focusing only on Prana in the Chakras and in the body. His awareness lingers on both components of each Chakra, internal and external, as long as he feels an irradiation of fresh energy that revitalizes each part of the body and supports it from within. This action is marked by the end of all physical movements, by a perfect physical and mental stillness. Sometimes the breath becomes so calm that the practitioner has the absolute perception that he is not breathing at all.

Mula Bandha In Mula Bandha the muscles of the perineum – between the anus and the genitals – are slightly contracted while mental pressure is exerted on the lower spine. (Unlike Aswini Mudra, one does not simply contract the sphincter muscles; in Mula Bandha the perineum appears to close upward while the pelvic diaphragm is pulled upward by the movement of the pubic bone.) By contracting this muscle group, the Apana current which gravitates normally downwards is lifted upwards, gradually joining with the Prana at the navel. Mula Bandha thus has the effect of causing Prana to flow into the channel of Sushumna rather than along Ida and Pingala.

Nada Yoga It is the path that leads to union with the Divine through listening to the inner sounds. Surat Shabda Yoga is another name for this practice. Nada Yoga is an experiential meditation. It has its basis in the fact that one who follows the mystical path infallibly encounters this manifestation of the Spirit – whatever his preparation and convictions may be. It is an extremely enjoyable form of meditation; anyone can be involved even without having fully understood it.

You can use a particular position of the body – crouched with the elbows resting on the knees, just to give an example – to plug both ears with the fingers. Sitting quietly, attention is focused on the subtle sounds that come from within and not on the audible sounds that come from outside. It is recommended to mentally repeat the favorite Mantra incessantly. Awareness of the inner sounds

will appear sooner or later; your listening skills will improve and your sensitivity to sounds will increase. There are different levels of progress in the experience of inner sounds: once the mind is stilled, we can hear the astral sounds that lie beneath the outer sounds. You will hear a hornet, a drum, the lute, the flute, the harp, the murmur of thunder or the hum of an electrical transformer. Some of these sounds are nothing more than the sounds of one's own body, especially the pumping of blood. Other sounds are actually "sounds beyond audible sounds." It is into this deeper realm that as you continue to calm your mind and turn it into relaxed concentration your awareness will be attracted. After a few weeks of zealous practice one will tune into a deeper sound than all the aforementioned astral sounds. This is the cosmic sound of Om. The sound is perceived with different variations: Lahiri Mahasaya describes it as "produced by many people who keep striking the disc of a bell". It is continuous "like oil flowing from a container".

Nadi Subtle channel through which energy flows throughout the body. The most important are Ida which flows vertically along the left side of the spinal column (it is said to be female in nature), and Pingala (male in nature) which flows parallel to the previous canal on the right side; Sushumna flows in the middle and represents the experience located beyond duality.

Nadi Sodhana Alternating nostril breathing exercise, it is not really part of Kriya Yoga. But since its effect of calming and clearing the mind (especially if the exercise is practiced in the morning) is unmatched, some kriyabans have made it part of their routine.

Navi Kriya Spiritual technique that is part of the procedures of the first level of Kriya Yoga. The essence of this technique is to dissolve inhalation and exhalation in the state of equilibrium in the navel, seat of the Samana current. It is combined in different ways with the practice of Kriya Pranayama. Some schools that do not specifically teach it offer substitutes for this practice.

New Age The term New Age derives from the statement that our solar system has entered the sign of Aquarius. The New Age sensibility is characterized by the perception of something "planetary" which is manifesting itself today.

Some important men of science have contributed to this sensitivity. The essential fact is that people have understood that the discoveries of Physics, of Alternative Medicine, the developments of Depth Psychology, all converge towards a single understanding: the substantial interdependence between the universe, the body, the psyche and the spiritual dimension of human beings. During the twentieth century, human thought took a great step in an evolutionary direction. There are many reasons to believe that, in the future, this epoch will be studied with the same respect with which we now study the epochs of Humanism, the Renaissance or the Enlightenment.

When, in the book, I mention some New Age "manias" I am referring to the excessive use of alternative remedies for any kind of real or imaginary

problems and also to much more dangerous theories borrowed very superficially from various esoteric currents, rather than to a healthy and profound progress in the expansion of one's awareness.

Omkar It is Om, the Divine Reality that sustains the universe, whose nature is vibration with specific aspects of sound, light and inner movement. The term "Omkar" or "Omkar Kriya" is also used to indicate any procedure that favors the Omkar experience.

Padmasana In this Asana, the right foot is placed on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh with the sole facing upwards. The name means "position in which the lotuses (Chakras) can be seen"; it is explained that, accompanied by Kechari and Shambhavi Mudra, this position creates an energetic condition in the body suitable for producing the experience of the internal light that comes from each Chakra.

Unfortunately, there are yogis who have had to have the cartilage removed from their knees after having forced themselves to assume this position for years. In Kriya Yoga, at least for those who live in the West and are not used to it since childhood, it is very wise and comfortable to practice either the half lotus or the Siddhasana position.

Paravastha This concept is related to that of "Sthir Tattwa (Tranquility)." Coined by Lahiri Mahasaya, it designates the state that is obtained by prolonging the effect following the practice of Kriya. It is not just joy and peace but something deeper, vital for us as a healing process. From our initial efforts to master his techniques, we perceive moments of profound peace and harmony with the rest of the world that extend throughout the day. Paravastha comes after years of discipline, when the breathless state has become familiar: the state of tranquility always lasts, it is no longer to be sought with care. Flashes of the final state of freedom comfort the mind as it faces the battles of life.

Pingala [see Nadi]

Prana The energy present in our psycho-physical system. The Prana is divided into Prana, Apana, Samana, Udana and Vijana which have their seat respectively in the chest, in the lower abdomen, in the region of the girdle, in the head and in the rest of the body – arms and legs. That the term Prana has two meanings cannot create confusion, if one considers the context in which it is used. In the initial stages of Kriya Pranayama we are mainly interested in Prana, Apana and Samana. When we use Shambhavi Mudra and during mental Pranayama we contact Udana. Through various techniques (such as Maha Mudra) and with the experience of Kriya Pranayama with Internalized Breath we get to know the fresh revitalizing nature of Vijana.

Pranayama The term Pranayama contains two roots: the first is Prana; the second can be either Ayama (expansion) or Yama (control). Thus the term Pranayama can be understood both as "Expansion of Prana" and "Control of Prana". I would prefer the first meaning of the term but I think the second is correct. In other words, Pranayama is the control of energy in the entire psycho-physical system, through the process of breathing, with the aim of receiving a beneficial effect or preparing the experience of meditation. The common exercises of Pranayama – although they do not involve the perception of some energetic current in the spine – can produce extraordinary experiences of strong energy flow along the spine. This is no small feat since such an experience can give the practitioner, hitherto skeptical, contact with spiritual reality and push him to make this reality become a fixed point of his existence.

In Kriya Pranayama the breathing process is coordinated with the attention moving up and down in the spine. While the breath is slow and deep, with the tongue either flat or turned backwards, the consciousness accompanies the movement of energy around the six Chakras. As the process deepens, the current flows into the deepest channel in the spine: Sushumna. When, after many years of practice, a subtle form of energy circulates (in a clearly perceptible way) within the body while the physical breath is totally placated, the kriyaban has an experience of boundless joy.

Samadhi According to Patanjali's Ashtanga (eight steps) Yoga, Samadhi is the state of deep contemplation in which the object of meditation becomes inseparable from the meditator: it occurs naturally after the states of Dharana and Dhyana.

The state of Samadhi is more than the perfection of the state of meditation. We discover that it is like a near death experience but independent of accidents and therefore beatific. The descriptions of Samadhi and near death experiences that we find in the vast literature follow the same pattern. Consciousness is allowed to enter a dimension beyond the mind; later this elevated awareness is integrated with daily life which is totally transformed. To those who ask whether it is correct to diminish the value of Samadhi by reducing it to a process of contacting the dimension beyond physical life for a certain time, we reply that this genuine experience is unmatched in promoting the ideals of a balanced spiritual life in a clean way. Of course there is something else besides Samadhi but it is useless to talk about it because our thinking is limited and we cannot understand.

Siddhasana The Sanskrit name means "Perfect Pose". In this Asana, the sole of the left foot is placed against the right thigh so that the heel presses on the perineum. The right heel is placed against the pubic bone. This position of the legs, combined with Kechari Mudra, closes the pranic circuit and makes Kriya Pranayama easy and profitable.

Sikhism The Sikh religion is founded on the teachings of Guru Nanak and nine successive Gurus; it is the fifth largest organized religion in the world. Interestingly, the key distinguishing feature of Sikhism is a non-anthropomorphic concept of God, to the point that one can interpret God as the Universe itself.

Sushumna [see Nadi]

Talabya Kriya This is an exercise in stretching the muscles of the tongue, in particular the frenulum, aimed at obtaining Kechari Mudra [see]. This practice creates a decisive calming effect on thoughts and it is for this reason that it is never put aside, even when Kechari Mudra is achieved.

Thokar A Kriya technique based on directing Prana towards the location of a Chakra through a particular movement of the head. In Kriya, Prana is normally directed towards the heart Chakra. By studying the practices of the Sufis, we discover that Lahiri Mahasaya's Thokar is one among many variants of the Sufi Dhikr.

Tribhangamurari This term refers to a variant of Thokar. The central teaching is to guide awareness along a three-curved path called Tribhangamurari (Tri-vanga-murari = three-curve-shape). These teachers explain that in the last part of His life, Lahiri Mahasaya drew with extreme precision the three-curve shape, which is perceived by deepening the meditation after Kriya Pranayama. This path begins in Bindu, climbs slightly to the left, then descends towards the right side of the body. When a particular point in the back is reached, it curves and moves to the left cutting the knot of Vishnu whose seat is in the heart Chakra. After reaching a point in the back to the left it changes direction again and points towards the location of the Brahma node in the coccyx region.

Uddiyana Bandha Abdominal lock: it is usually practiced with the breath out but in Kriya it is also used with the breath in especially during the practice of Mudra typical of Kriya such as: Maha Mudra, Navi Kriya and Yoni Mudra.

To practice it with the breath out Jalandhara Bandha is moderately utilized. Take a false inhalation (you perform the same action as an inhalation without actually letting the air into your body.) Pull your belly in as far as possible. Keep your breath out. To practice it with the breath in, slightly contract the abdominal muscles until you intensify the perception of the energy in the spinal column in the region of the Manipura Chakra.

Yama – Niyama Yama is Self-Control: non-violence, avoiding lies, avoiding stealing, avoiding cravings and lust and non-attachment. Niyama are religious observances: cleansing, contentment, discipline, study of the Self and surrender to the Supreme God. While in most schools of Kriya, these rules are set as preconditions to be respected in order to receive initiation, a sensible researcher understands that they should instead be considered as the consequences of a

correct practice of Yoga. A beginner cannot understand what "Study of the Self" means. Some teacher repeats, like a parrot, the need to observe those rules and, after having given absurd explanations on some of the previous points (in particular what mental trick to use in order ... to avoid the greed of the flesh ..) goes on to explain the techniques. Why utter empty words? The mystical path, when honestly followed, cannot accept the compromise of rhetoric. When a statement is made, it is just that. Yama and Niyama are a good theme to study, an ideal to keep in mind but not a solemn promise. It is only with the practice of meditation that it is possible to understand their meaning and, consequently, to see them flourish in one's life.

Yoga Sutra (work of Patanjali) The Yoga Sutras are a text that has greatly influenced the philosophy and practice of Yoga: more than fifty different English translations are the testimony of its importance. Although we cannot be sure of the exact time in which their author Patanjali lived, we can place it between 200 BC. and 200 A.D. The Yoga Sutras consist of a collection of 195 aphorisms that deal with the philosophical aspects of mind and awareness forming a solid theoretical basis of Raja Yoga – the Yoga of self discipline and meditation. Yoga is described as a path made up of eight steps (Ashtanga) which are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. The first five steps form the psycho-physical foundation for having a true spiritual experience; the last three concern the way of disciplining the mind until its dissolution in the ecstatic experience. They also define some esoteric concepts, common to all traditions of Indian thought, such as Karma. Although Patanjali is sometimes called "the father of Yoga", his work is actually a summary of pre-existing oral yoga traditions, a patchy set of practices that reveal an indistinct and contradictory theoretical background. However its importance is beyond question: he made clear what others had taught; how too abstract it was, he made it practical! He was a brilliant thinker, not just a compiler of precepts. Its balance between theism and atheism is greatly appreciated. We do not find the slightest hint of worshiping idols, gods, gurus, or sacred books – at the same time we do not find any atheistic doctrine. We know that "Yoga" in addition to being a rigid system of meditation practice implies devotion to the Eternal Intelligence or the Self. Patanjali affirms the importance of directing the aspiration of the heart towards Om.

Yoni Mudra The potential of this technique includes, in effect, the final realization of the Kriya path. The Kutastha, between the eyebrows, is the place where the individual soul had its origin: the deceptive Ego needs to be dissolved right there. The core of the technique is to bring all the energy to the point between the eyebrows and prevent its dispersion by closing the openings in the head – the breath is stilled in the region from the throat to the point between the eyebrows. If a state of deep relaxation is established in the body, this practice manages to give rise to a very intense ecstatic state that spreads throughout the being. As far as practical realization is concerned, there are slight differences between the schools: some give greater importance to the vision of the Light and

less to the dissolving of the breath and the mind. Among the first, there are those who teach, keeping more or less the same position of the fingers, to focus on each Chakra and to perceive their different colors. A satisfying observation, found in traditional Yoga literature, is that this technique derives its name "Yoni", which means "womb", from the fact that like the baby in the womb, the practitioner has no contact with the outside world, and therefore, consciousness is turned inwards only.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anonymous, R.M. French, trs. *The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.

Arnold, Sir Edwin. *The Song Celestial or Bhagavad-Gita (From the Mahabharata)*. Middlesex: Echo Library, 2008.

_____. *The Light of Asia or the Great Renunciation*. Dearborn, MI: University of Michigan Library, 2009.

Aurobindo, Sri. *Collected Poems*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972.

_____. *Thoughts and Aphorisms*. Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press, 1982.

Bernard, Theos. *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience*. Edinburgh: Harmony Publishing, 2007.

Dhillon, Harish. *The First Sikh Spiritual Master: Timeless Wisdom from the Life and Techniques of Guru Nanak*. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2006.

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2009.

Chatterjee, Ashoke Kumar. *Purana Purusha Yogiraj Sri Shama Churn Lahiree*. Vedicbooks.net, 2000.

Easwaran, Eknath. *The Upanishads*. Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 2007.

Eckhart, Meister. *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense (Classics of Western Spirituality)*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981.

Feild, Reshad. *The Invisible Way: A Time to Love, A Time to Die*. Boston: Element Books, 1994.

_____. *Steps to Freedom: Discourses on the Essential Knowledge of the Heart*. Decatur, GA: Chalice Guild, 1998.

_____. *The Last Barrier: A Journey into the Essence of Sufi Teachings*. Lindisfarne Books, 2002.

Feuerstein, Georg. *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga*. New York: Paragon House, 1990.

- Frossard, André. *God Exists: I Have Met Him*. London: Collins, 1970.
- Goel B. S. *Psycho-Analysis and Meditation, Vol.II*. Haryana, India: Third Eye Foundation of India, 1989
- Goleman, Daniel and Richard J. Davidson. *Consciousness: Brain, States of Awareness and Mysticism*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979.
- Iyengar, B.K.S. *Light on Yoga*. New York: Schocken Books, 1995.
- _____. *Light on Pranayama: The Yogic Art of Breathing*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998.
- Johari, Harish. *Chakras: Energy Centers of Transformation*. Rochester: Destiny Books, 1987.
- John of the Cross, St. *Dark Night of the Soul*. New York: Image Books, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1990.
- Johnson, Julian. *The Path of the Masters: The Science of Surat Shabda Yoga*. Punjab: Radha Soami Satsang Beas, 1972.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*. R.F.C. Hull, trs. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- _____. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. (rev. ed.). Aniela Jaffé, ed.; R. Winston and C. Winston, trs. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- K'uan Yü, Lu (Charles Luk). *Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality*. New York: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1999.
- Kabir, *Songs of Kabîr: A 15th Century Sufi Literary Classic*. Rabindranath Tagore, trs. Boston: Wiser Books, 2002.
- Krishna, Gopi. *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997.
- Krishna, Gopi. *Kundalini: The Secret of Yoga*. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.
- Leser-Lasario, Benno Max. *Lehrbuch der Original-Gebärden-Atmung*. Geinhausen: Lebens-weiser-Verlag, 1931.
- Mallinson, James. *The Gheranda Samhita*. Woodstock, NY: Yoga Vidya, 2004.
- _____. *The Shiva Samhita*. Woodstock, NY: Yoga Vidya, 2007.

- Mann, Gurinder Singh. *Sikhism*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004.
- Moody Raymond. *Life beyond Life*. London: HarperOne (2001)
- Motoyama, Hiroshi. *Theories of the Chakras: Bridge to Higher Consciousness*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1982.
- Muktananda, Swami. *Play of Consciousness: A Spiritual Autobiography*. Siddha Yoga Publications, 2000.
- Osborne, Arthur. *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis Books, 2006.
- Rama, Swami. *Path of Fire and Light Vol. I and II*. Honesdale, Pennsylvania: Himalayan Institute Press, 2004.
- Ramdas, Swami. *In the Vision of God*. San Diego, CA: Blue Dove Press, 1995.
- _____. *In Quest of God*. San Diego, CA: Blue Dove Press, 2002.
- Rumi, Maulana Jalal'al-din, Coleman Barks, trs. *The Soul of Rumi: A New Collection of Ecstatic Poems*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002.
- _____, Coleman Barks, trs. *The Book of Love: Poems of Ecstasy and Longing*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005.
- Sadhananda Giri, Swami. *Kriya Yoga: Its Mystery and Performing Art*. Howrah, West Bengal: Jujersa Yogashram, 1998.
- Satprem. *Mother's Agenda*. New York: Institute for Evolutionary Research, 1979.
- _____. *Sri Aurobindo, or the Adventure of Consciousness*. Mysore: Mira Aditi Centre, 2000.
- _____. *Mother, or the Divine Materialism*. Mysore: Mira Aditi Centre, 2003.
- Sailendra Bejoy Dasgupta, Sri. *Light of Kriya Yoga*. London: Yoga Niketan, 2008.
- Satyananda Giri, Swami. *Kriya Quotes from Swami Satyananda*. London: Yoga Niketan, 2004.
- Satyananda Saraswati, Swami. *A Systematic Course in the Ancient Tantric Techniques of Yoga and Kriya*. Munger: Bihar School of Yoga, 2004.
- _____. *Asana, Pranayama, Mudra and Bandha*. Munger:

Bihar School of Yoga, 2003.

_____. *Kundalini Tantra*. Munger: Bihar School of Yoga, 2008.

Sharma, Ishwar C. (H.H. Manav Dayal). *Surat-Shabda Yoga (The Yoga of Light and Sound "Instructions for Seekers")*. New Delhi: Diamond Pocket Books, 1991.

Sivananda Radha, Swami. *Kundalini: Yoga for the West*. Spokane, WA: Timeless Books, 2004.

_____. *Hatha Yoga: The Hidden Language, Symbols, Secrets and Metaphors*. Spokane, WA: Timeless Books, 2006.

Spiesberger, Karl. *Das Mantra-Buch*. Berlin: Verlag Richard Schikowski, 1977.

Svatmarama. *The Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. Woodstock, NY: Yoga Vidya, 2002.

Taimni, I.K. *The Science of Yoga*. Chennai: Nesma Books, 1994.

Teresa of Avila, St. *Interior Castle*. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2007.

Van Lysebeth, André. *Tantra: The Cult of the Feminine*. New York: Samuel Weiser Inc., 2002.

_____. *Pranayama: The Yoga of Breathing*. Edinburgh: Harmony Publishing, 2007.

Vivekananda, Swami. *Raja-Yoga*. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1980.

Weinfurter, Karl. *Der brennende Busch: Der entschleierte Weg der Mystik*. Bopfingen: Karl Rohm Verlag, 1994.

Willigis Jager. *Search for the meaning of life*. Liguori/Triumph: Revised edition May 30

Yogananda, Paramhansa. *Autobiography of a Yogi* (reprint of original 1946 edition). Nevada City, CA: Crystal Clarity Publishers, 2003.